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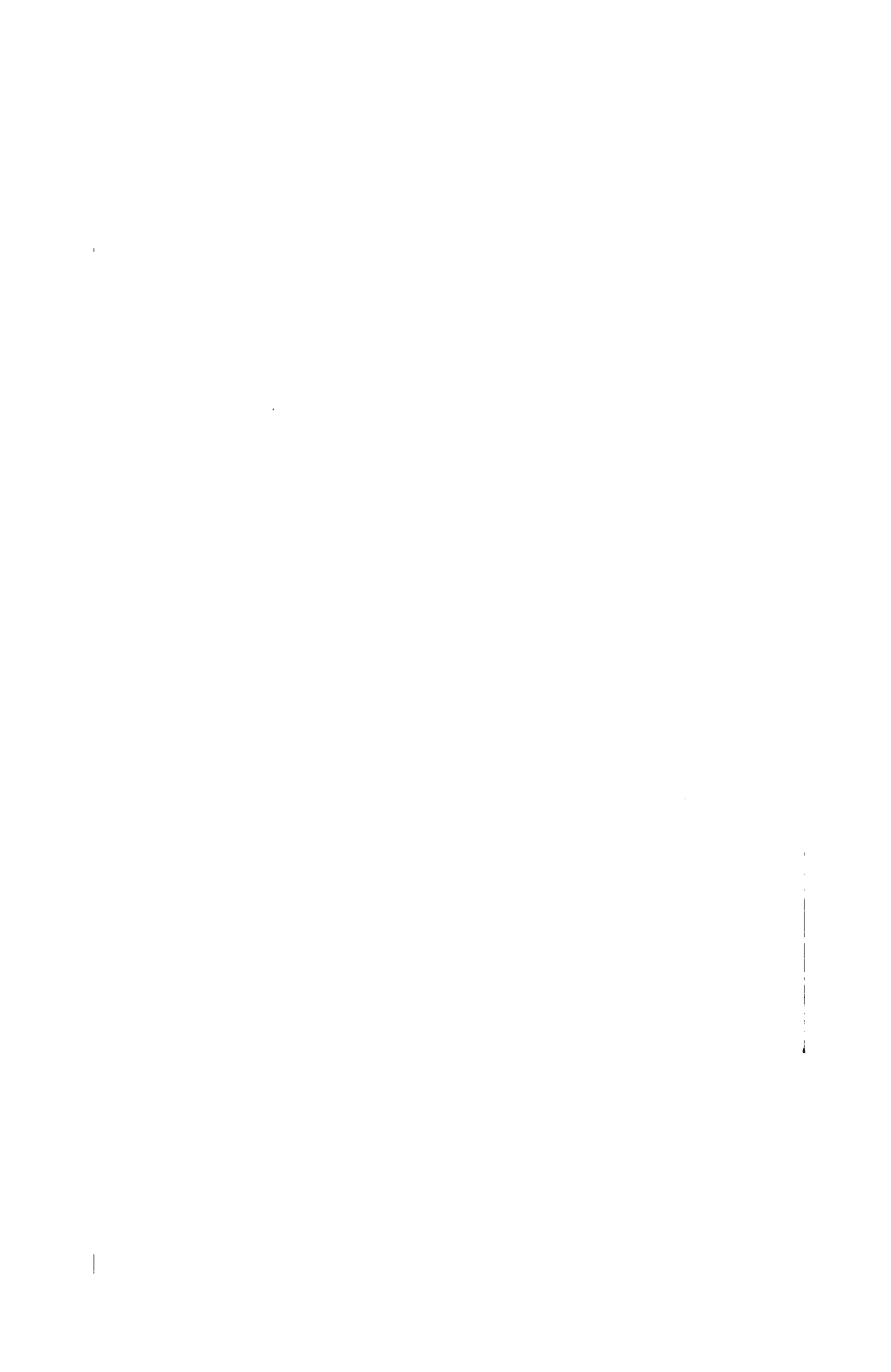
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March 1877 -

"E S S A Y S,"

BY A BARRISTER.

(REPRINTED FROM THE SATURDAY REVIEW.)

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.

M.DCCC.LXII.

1862



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CONTENTS.



ESSAY	PAGE
✓ I. CASUISTRY	1
II. MR. HALLAM	16
✓ III. CONVENTIONAL MORALITY	31
IV. PHILANTHROPY	41
V. THE WEALTH OF NATURE	48
VI. JOHN BULL	58
VII. PHYSICAL STRENGTH	69
VIII. DOING GOOD	78
IX. GENIALITY	89
X. LORD MACAULAY	97
XI. LIMITATIONS OF MORALITY	107
XII. CHRISTIAN OPTIMISM	114
XIII. FANATICISM	123
XIV. THE END OF THE WORLD	134
XV. PAIN	142
XVI. CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA	150
XVII. MENTAL STATURE	160
XVIII. MINOR VIRTUES	168

ESSAY	PAGE
XIX. COURAGE	175
XX. THE VANITY OF HUMAN WISHES.	183
XXI. JUNIORES PRIORES	191
XXII. MORALITY AND SENSIBILITY	199
XXIII. PUBLIC AND PRIVATE MORALS	208
XXIV. SECONDHAND KNOWLEDGE	215
XXV. SPIRIT-RAPPING	224
XXVI. GAMALIELS	234
XXVII. MR. CARLYLE	242
XXVIII. PASCAL'S PENSEES	254
XXIX. JOSEPH DE MAISTRE	267
XXX. PLUTARCH'S LIVES	280
XXXI. PALEY'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY	293
XXXII. THE MINISTER'S WOOING	307
XXXIII. MR. MANSEL'S METAPHYSICS	320

ESSAYS.

I.

CASUISTRY.

THERE are two classes of persons who may not unfairly be described as the scrupulous and the unscrupulous, if we are careful to forget what Bentham would have called the eulogistic and dyslogistic associations which have been gradually affixed to those words. There are men who, though not more pious than their neighbours, are always doubting whether they may do this or that on a Sunday—whether they can justifiably read a newspaper on that day, and if so, what newspaper, and what parts of it—whether they can safely swear that the Pope *hath* not, as well as that he *ought not*, to have, jurisdiction in these islands—and so on of an infinite number of similar things. There are, on the other hand, persons who are substantially quite as good as their scrupulous neighbours, but to whom questions of this kind never present themselves as questions. They will give signatures, make declarations, and occasionally take oaths, with hardly a feeling of

uneasiness, although the form of the oath may be open to any quantity of misconstruction. Their remark upon the matter, if their attention were drawn to it, would probably be that it was only a form, and did not signify.

It is not a satisfactory explanation of this diversity of practice and character to say that some people are naturally crotchety, while others are naturally unscrupulous. There are two theories of morality on which the proceedings of these two classes may respectively be justified; and though the adoption of the one or the other is no doubt determined far more often by natural temperament than by any process of speculation, it is worth while to point out the logical basis of conduct which is decided on without reference to logic. The tacit assumption which lies at the root of all scrupulous morality is that morals form a rigid system, standing in precisely the same relation to the conscience as that which legal rules occupy in civil life, so that it is possible to say definitely of a given act, not only that it is right or wrong, but in what precise degree it falls below the standard, and so incurs guilt, or rises above it, and so possesses merit. This is the fundamental principle of casuistry; and it is to the fact that such a conception is possible, and indeed common and influential, that casuists appeal when they are charged with immorality. It is remarkable that the charge should always be brought against them, and that it should always be popular, though many persons who join in it would not be prepared to deny the principles from which the practice objected to is derived. It is closely analogous to the charge of quibbling and

hairsplitting which is always brought against lawyers, and it so happens that one of the most influential and successful books ever written furnishes a complete illustration of the topics which can be urged in favour of it. The book in question is Pascal's *Provincial Letters*. Their success, both in literature and politics, was so great, that the main position which they enforce derives additional interest, and an additional title to examination from the bare fact that they support it.

Though the earlier *Provincial Letters* (for the first eleven form the pith of the book) contain several passages which jar on the feelings of an ordinary English reader, the first impression derived from them is, that of all the refutations ever written, they are the most triumphant and conclusive. The condition to which they reduce the Jesuits can be compared to nothing but that to which Lord Macaulay reduced Mr. Robert Montgomery. With hardly any perceptible effort, but with incidental smiling ease, they are shown to be the advocates of theft, murder, calumny, gluttony, magic, and fraudulent bankruptcy. Their object, says their assailant, is to govern the world by pandering to its impatience of the severity of Christian morals, and they carry out their design so completely that they subvert in turn every Christian duty—civil, social, and religious. It is easy to imagine the transport with which such denunciations of an unpopular and justly suspected body were received when they were written, and it is impossible not to sympathize with the genius of the author; but on cooler observation, the *Provincial Letters* appear less conclusive than they seemed at

first, and it will be found that they raise several questions of vast importance to mankind at large, which are even now imperfectly understood, and which deeply affect the daily conduct of our lives and the whole tone of our thoughts.

Between our own conception of morality and that which prevailed amongst both Jesuits and Jansenists two centuries ago, there is one broad and deep difference of principle, on which all subordinate differences depend. According to our modern view, Law and Morals are radically distinct from, and in a certain sense opposed to, each other. A person who never breaks the law at all may be much more wicked than one who breaks it often. A man who goes up to the very verge of breaking it—who stretches out his hand to steal, and draws it back only when the policeman passes—who draws the knife to stab, and is restrained from using it only by the grossest cowardice—is, in the eye of the law, on exactly the same footing as one who never felt a dishonest or murderous emotion. So, again, if a man steals from a dwelling-house to the value of 4*l.* 19*s.*, he incurs one penalty; if the property stolen is worth only one shilling more, the penalty is greatly increased, though the wickedness remains the same. In the same way, a crime committed at five minutes past nine on a summer's evening, in broad daylight, is liable to heavier punishment than a similar or more serious offence committed at half-past eight on a winter night. Most people feel that this must be so, though they may not see the cause of it.


A feeling equally widespread suggests that in

morality such strictness is neither possible nor desirable, and that legal definitions are positive hindrances when our object is to discuss the sin as distinguished from the crime. The fact that, for a particular purpose, people choose to apply the same epithet to three persons, of whom the first treacherously poisons his friend, the second unintentionally kills a constable who lawfully arrests him, and the third jumps into the Thames with her starving child in her arms, is only a source of confusion when we attempt to estimate the guilt of such conduct. Every one must feel that, though all three were equally murderers, their acts were very far indeed from being equally wicked, and even from bearing any kind of relation to each other. The notion of gauging moral guilt has been long, and happily, given up in Protestant countries. We can say that some things are wrong—that some are very wrong indeed, and some abominable; but we have no sort of measure by which we can compare the enormity of different sins, so as to say, for example, whether adultery is worse than burglary with violence, or how many thefts are collectively as bad as a murder.

This contrast between the legal and the moral estimate of a crime is sometimes supposed to arise from the defects of law, and in many cases it does so; but of these defects, if such they are, the one which has most influence in this respect is inseparable from the very notion of law. It is that laws must be definite, and all definitions exclude on the one side and include on the other many cases which are not distinguished by any more tangible difference

than the trees on the British and American side of the Canadian frontier.


Thus, for example, theft is a crime which it is necessary to define, and the law defines it accordingly to consist in "taking and carrying away," under certain circumstances, the property of another. Every one has a very vivid notion of what he means by a theft, every one is apt to suppose that his notion is not only vivid but exact, and most people would probably assent without much difficulty to the legal definition of the crime. They would probably admit, for example, that a man who took hold of another person's horse by the bridle, intending to steal him, and then immediately changed his mind, and let go again, had not actually committed theft; but it would be equally clear to popular apprehension that he had committed it if he not only laid hold of the bridle, but mounted and rode off. When, however, the matter is drawn somewhat closer, it assumes a very different appearance; and to any one but a lawyer the definition appears altogether shadowy and absurd when the question of thief or no thief is made to depend on the question whether a man turned over a bale of goods in a cart or whether he only handled it. The attempt to fix the dividing point at which the *locus penitentie* ends and the crime begins, is exactly like the attempt to say at what precise second the dawn begins, or a man reaches his full stature. Difficult, however, and apparently ludicrous as the task is, it is one which lawyers cannot be relieved from undertaking; for the alternative is the introduction into the law of an element of arbitrary power on



the part of judges and juries, which would be a far greater evil than the existence of a debateable land in which it is difficult to determine whether actions are criminal or not.

In former times, the contrast between the definite character of law and the indefinite character of morality was not understood; morality was considered to be subject to rules as precise as law itself; indeed the two subjects can hardly be said to have been separated till very recently. Law was almost universally regarded as something which had an independent existence, like the physical phenomena of gravitation, sound, and light; and morality was considered as a science hardly less complete and definite than arithmetic. One great reason for this was supplied by the practice of confession. The confessor had to allot so much penance for such an act. Of course the criminality of the act, and in many cases the question whether it was a mortal or a venial sin, depended upon an infinite number of surrounding circumstances of aggravation or extenuation. Hence a system gradually sprung up which had a surprising affinity to what is known to modern English lawyers as case law. This system was casuistry, which in Roman Catholic countries is part of the indispensable apparatus of the priesthood, and forms a system of criminal law of the most searching kind. The consequence of assuming the spiritual direction of the consciences of large numbers of people, in respect of all their feelings and actions, is that it is necessary to be provided with a scale setting forth not only whether any particular act is right or wrong, but whether it is right or wrong in

a particular degree, and what amount of punishment, in the shape of penance, it has, if wrong, deserved. This, though it is but little understood, is the true point of connection between casuistry and immorality. Dens, and the other writers who have obtained so unenviable a notoriety amongst Protestants, are in reality the Archbolds or Chittys of their profession; and the immorality which may fairly be imputed to them lies in the general conception of morals on which they proceed, and not in the particular unseemly results at which they may have arrived. The respectable legal authors just named, might appear to talk most horrible iniquity if the peculiar circumstances under which they write were not borne in mind. Thus, Mr. Archbold says, "To kill a child in the mother's womb is no murder;" and again, "It is not murder to kill an alien enemy in time of war;" "Taking away a man's life by perjury is not, it seems, in law murder." The same author teaches that it is not perjury to swear that A. beat B. with a sword, when, in fact, he beat him with a stick; nor, under certain circumstances, to take a false oath before Commissioners of Bankruptcy. He says that, if a carrier appropriates a parcel entrusted to him, it is not theft, and many other doctrines equally subversive of all social order might be extracted from his works; but no one considers them immoral, because they claim only to be legal. Excuses somewhat similar in principle might be offered for the most apparently revolting doctrines of the casuists. The real objection to them is that they applied legal rules to a subject matter which had nothing to do with them.



It follows from this that Pascal's attack upon the Jesuits must either go a great deal further than its author intended it to go, or must be considered to apply at least as strongly to the Jansenists as to their opponents. Pascal was the partisan of a system of morality of the most rigid kind; and it is singular that it should not have been more frequently observed, that in the *Provincial Letters* he continually lays himself open to retorts as to his own views, which it would have been very difficult to parry; and it may be added, that if, upon such a subject, any weight at all is to be attached to facts and history, it is not less difficult to justify his views of morality than to justify those which he attacked. In fact, the Jesuits' views have some advantages over his. Whatever were their faults, they seem to have felt that a system of morality which absolutely condemns the whole existing state of society, and which would, if adopted, bind in iron chains all the energies and all the affections of mankind, stands self-refuted. In their anxiety to bring human life within the pale of salvation, the Jesuits may have stretched their system further than they had any right to stretch it; but if it is once granted (and at that time it was universally admitted) that morality is capable of being reduced to a system at all, the wish that there may be some sort of proportion between that system and the actual state of human society is one to which it is impossible to refuse a considerable degree of sympathy.

The ordinary illustrations of the Jesuits' morals are matter of notoriety, and are circulated principally by those who look upon Jesuits as *capita lupina*

whom it is a Christian duty to invest with every horrible attribute that can be imagined. A few may be mentioned in order to show not so much the extravagances into which they ran, as the legal manner in which they speculated, and in which all persons must of necessity speculate who profess to decide upon the right and wrong of extreme cases in morality, and to administer a system of what is virtually criminal law in connection with their speculations.

Take, for example, the following: Escobar, as quoted by Pascal, says—"Promises are not obligatory unless the promisor intends to bind himself when he makes them. This intention is not common unless they are confirmed by oath or contract; so that if a person says simply, 'I will do it,' he means, 'I will do it if I do not change my mind;' for he does not mean by what he says to deprive himself of his liberty." Nothing, of course, can sound more dishonest than this: and nothing could be more dishonest than to address such an admonition to a person who wished to evade an obligation. In such a case, the proper advice would of course be to fulfil the promise at the expense of any amount of suffering or loss; but this and similar passages occur not in sermons but in law books, and in judging of their morality the question is, not whether they would make a good impression on an ordinary or on an ill-disposed hearer, but whether there is any considerable class of cases to which they apply. Such a class there undoubtedly is. Escobar's doctrine is no more than the legal maxim, *Ex nudo pacto non oritur actio*, applied to morals. If a man says to

his servant, "Have my clothes brushed to-morrow at half-past six; I shall get up at that hour," it would be absurd to say that he was bound in conscience to get up accordingly. If a person says to another, "I will give you 100*l*," he would surely be at liberty to rescind his promise if he saw grounds of expediency for doing so, unless the person to whom it was made had done anything by way of consideration for it. If he had said, "I will give you 100*l*. to furnish such and such rooms, if you will take a lease of them"—and if the lease were taken, or if the promisee had ordered goods on the faith of a bare promise, and the promisor knew it—it would be highly dishonourable and wicked to retract, whatever might be the loss and inconvenience of fulfilling the engagement. It is, no doubt, easy to put cases in which this or any general rule would sanction unhandsome and even fraudulent conduct, but that is the disadvantage of all express general rules; and the general rule which Pascal's unqualified condemnation of Escobar implies, would be perfectly intolerable. It would run thus—"Promises are obligatory, although it was not the intention of the promisor to oblige himself when he made them; so that if a man says, 'I will do it,' he debars himself from changing his mind, and leaves himself no liberty respecting it." If this were the general understanding of men, and the true interpretation of human language, all intercourse would become impossible. In a vast proportion of cases, a promise in form is meant, and is understood, as a mere intimation of present intention; and all systems of law agree in considering that, to be binding, a contract must be

mutual. This obligation is of course enlarged in point of morality by a great number of considerations, which cannot be brought within any inflexible rule; but if we must have an inflexible rule at all, Escobar's (though it may be expressed so loosely and imperfectly as to open a wide door to fraud) is in principle better and truer than Pascal's.

Not only did Pascal misrepresent his antagonists by overlooking the essential conditions of the problem which, in common with them, he seems to have considered as soluble—the problem of framing a system of general rules by which the degree of immorality of any given action whatever may be determined—but the extraordinary rigidity and harshness of his own system laid him under some difficulties from which they are exempt. For example, he is greatly scandalized at the following passage from Escobar:—"Is it permitted to eat and drink as much as we please (*tout son saoul*), without necessity and for mere pleasure? Certainly, according to Sanchez, if it does not hurt our health, for it is permitted to the natural appetite to enjoy the actions which belong to it." If this maxim is wrong, and if any systematic view of the subject can be taken, there would seem to be no possibility of stopping short of the principle that it is wrong to eat or drink as much as we like for mere pleasure and without necessity, and although it would not hurt our health to do so. A man eats half a dozen strawberries (being as much as he wants—*tout son saoul*) after dinner—is this a sin? If Escobar is wrong, it would seem that it is. Suppose the half-dozen become a dozen, two dozen, three dozen, or more, is it possible

to draw any better line with regard to the lawfulness of the indulgence (considerations of selfishness and decency being out of the question), than that which Escobar actually does draw? A late traveller in Siberia came upon a wilderness full of wild raspberries. If he had had the requisite appetite and digestion, why might he not have eaten a cart-load of them, if he had no other way of passing his time? If the principle which Pascal appears to imply were the true one, no one would ever take a meal without sin; for even the prisoners in a gaol eat some part of their food merely because it pleases their palates. Illustrations of Pascal's views in this respect might be multiplied to almost any extent. It seems a fair inference, from one passage of his book, to suppose that he maintained that it was a duty to give in alms the whole of our superfluous property; and from another, that he considered all desire to rise in the social scale, even (as he expressly says) by legitimate modes, as being sins of ambition. In a third passage, he distinctly maintains that it is wrong to lend money at interest. Usury, he says, consists in receiving back more money than you lent. In short, his views lead logically to consequences as fatal to human society as those which he attacks.

The whole point and force of the *Provincial Letters* lies in the assumption that there is a code of morality which can be put into an express systematic form, according to which all actions must be regulated, and which the maxims of the Jesuits either evaded or overthrew. The conclusion deducible from this, the most eloquent and memorable of all denunciations of casuistry, is, that the system which Pascal invested

with these glorious attributes was arbitrary, and in many respects false; and that, if it had been strictly applied to the purpose to which Jansenists and Jesuits alike contended that systems of morality ought to be applied, it would have speedily reduced the world to a monastery or a wilderness. If it is admitted that it is a formal duty to give to the poor all superfluities, one of three results is inevitable—either the world must go on and prosper in and by wickedness; or it must be turned into a huge waste of listless sloth and beggary; or the word “superfluity” must be defined in such a manner as to avert this consequence. It is this evasion with which Pascal so bitterly reproaches the Jesuits. Certainly it would have been better to deny than to evade the obligation, but it was a less evil to evade than it would have been to enforce it. Indeed, the evasion can hardly be called dishonest. The Jesuits said that whatever was necessary for the maintenance of a man’s state and position in society, according to his rank, was not part of his superfluities. From this, says Pascal, they drew the consequence that few people had any superfluities; but the consequence and the principle stand on different grounds.

Casuistry will never be fully disposed of, and finally laid on one side, till people have learnt that morality must be to a great extent indefinite, and that moral definitions are, in reality, little more than descriptions. This view, however, like the casuistical theory, has its inconveniences. The most important of them is that it constantly tends to make the feelings or conscience of an individual the test of right or wrong for all mankind, and thus the greatest

laxity or the most rigid asceticism may be held up as the only right and sensible course, according to the temper of the person who makes the assertion. When Theodore Hook signed the Thirty-nine Articles, adding, "Forty, if you like"—when importers perjured themselves by the hour under the system of custom-house oaths; and when, on the other hand, Wesley maintained that to save money was robbery of the poor—they all erred in erecting a personal instead of a general standard of right and wrong. Hook probably would not have committed forgery, nor would the importers of French wine have perjured themselves at the Old Bailey, nor would Wesley have admitted that property was a robbery; but it was merely a personal sentiment which would have prevented them from doing so; for, if they had generalized upon their own conduct, it could have been justified only by propositions which would have involved these consequences.

How these two opposite theories are to be harmonized, what is the meeting-point of law and morals, how we are to know when it is wise to be scrupulous and when not, are questions of vast interest and importance which cannot be discussed here. But it is very desirable, in the midst of the petty squabbles which arise on these topics, to remember the vast questions which underlie them. The reflection that such questions exist might go far to allay the violence of many of our popular controversialists, if they were capable of entertaining it.

November 27, 1858.

II.


MR. HALLAM.

THE death of Mr. Hallam suggests a short retrospect on his career. No man devoted his life to more severe or arduous studies. Hardly any one whose reputation was so high was less widely known to the world at large. Beyond his own family and his personal friends, he was, generally speaking, little more than a name. Indeed, there was not much in his career to attract that general public attention and interest which is one of the greatest calamities that can befall a man of letters. His father was Dean of Wells, and he was born in or about the year 1779. He was educated at Eton and Christchurch, and was called to the bar by the Inner Temple, of which society he was afterwards a bencher. He never obtained any eminence as a barrister, having exchanged that calling at an early age for the place of a Commissioner of Audit, which he held for many years, and which gave him the opportunity of establishing his great literary reputation. With one touching exception, his life was passed quietly and silently in the composition of his three great works—the *Middle Ages*, the *Constitutional History of England*, and the *History of Literature*. It is remarkable that the domestic calamities of one whose life was so

retired, should have attracted so large a share of public sympathy. The death of two sons, at the time when their loss was on every account most painful, was certainly as grievous a trial as a man could be called upon to bear; but in Mr. Hallam's case attention was attracted to the loss, not only by the remarkable manner in which our only living poet testified his affection for the elder son, but by the extraordinary promise which each of them had just time to display before his death. Those who are interested by the spectacle of that uncontrollable progress which makes an indelible though indefinable distinction between different generations, can seldom have met with a better instance of it than was afforded by the difference between Mr. Hallam and the sons whom he loved so dearly, and who so cordially returned his affection. The fragments of Arthur Hallam's composition which still remain present the same sort of contrast to his father's style of thought as Mr. Tennyson's poems do to Pope's, or Mr. Kingsley's sermons to Paley's. It is pleasant to know that such differences left untouched the mutual affection and admiration which existed between the father and the sons.

Singular as are the circumstances which have associated Mr. Hallam's name in many minds with such recollections as these, their connexion with his memory will, no doubt, be transient. His historical reputation will, in all probability, last as long as the Constitution of which his works explain the origin and record the growth. The position which they occupy in English literature is well worthy of consideration; and it may be interesting to attempt to

explain the relation in which they stand to some of the other works which have been written upon the same subject. Though Mr. Hallam never practised law as a profession, his habits of mind were deeply influenced by his legal studies. In almost every part of his works, the lawyer's temper and the lawyer's canons of criticism may be traced. Indeed, it may almost be said that the predominant object of his books was to cast the history of England in a legal mould. The possibility that a man of Mr. Hallam's ability should undertake such a task, is in itself characteristic. It could have occurred in no other country. To review with an all but passionless calmness all the cardinal points of English History, and to pass judgment upon them in the spirit of Westminster Hall, is a view of political life both characteristic of, but welcome to, the English mind. Let any one try to imagine the history of France written in such a spirit—let him conceive the difficulty, or rather the absurdity, of attempting to solve the problem of the legality of the quarrels between the Burgundians and Armagnacs, the Wars of the League, the policy of Louis XIV. and Louis XV. towards the parliaments—and, above all, the series of revolutions which have distracted the country since the year 1789. Justice has been administered in France between man and man, and between the State and private criminals intelligibly enough, but the notion of a law which can control the Government is still exclusively English. It is this that gives unity and interest to Mr. Hallam's books—an interest which maintains itself in the face of a style too compact and severe to have attractions for any but serious readers.



Mr. Hallam, as his readers are aware, dates the English Constitution from the reign of Edward I., and every one who has made a serious study of the early part of our history must have been struck with the judgment which he displayed in doing so. Though such writers as Mr. Allen have succeeded in tracing the rudiments of a parliamentary system back even to the time of William the Conqueror, many years passed before the law was otherwise than a partial and arbitrary system. It is well known that no act of the Conqueror's excited greater indignation and terror than his execution of Waltheof for treason, the gravamen of which lay rather in the rank than in the innocence of the sufferer. In the early part of the twelfth century, perpetual imprisonment was the severest punishment which Henry I. could venture to inflict on a great lord (John de Belesme) who was convicted of no less than forty-two outrageous acts of rebellion and murder: and even this was not brought about without overcoming considerable resistance on the part of the rest of the nobility. The same state of things may be traced to a certain extent through the reigns of Henry II., Richard I., and John; but Magna Charta (which has been ignorantly and absurdly described as a mere result of aristocratic violence) introduced a change which no one can appreciate who has not followed Mr. Hallam's advice by comparing Matthew Paris with Ordericus, Malmesbury, and Newbury. To use his own striking language—

“From this era a new soul was infused into the people of England. Her liberties, at the best long


“in abeyance, became a tangible possession, and
“indefinite aspirations for the laws of Edward the
“Confessor were changed into a steady regard for
“the Great Charter. Pass but from the history of
“Roger de Hoveden to that of Matthew Paris—
“from the second Henry to the third—and judge
“whether the victorious struggle had not excited an
“energy of public spirit to which the nation was
“before a stranger. The strong man, in the sublime
“language of Milton, was aroused from sleep, and
“shook his invincible locks. Tyranny, indeed, and
“injustice, will, by all historians not absolutely ser-
“vile, be noted with moral reprobation, but never
“shall we find in the English writers of the twelfth
“century that assertion of positive and national rights
“which distinguishes those of the next age, and par-
“ticularly the monk of St. Albans.”

After the confusion of Henry III.'s reign, we find in the Parliament Rolls of Edward I. conclusive evidence of the full practical establishment and vigorous operation of that great principle which to this hour is the exclusive possession of our country—that no man or body of men, whatever may be their position or authority, and whether they are or are not acting officially, or even by the express command of the king himself, are superior to the law. Edward II. was infinitely more distressed and injured by the illegality and informality of his execution of the Earl of Lancaster, in 1317, than Louis Napoleon was in 1858, when he transported hundreds of men to Lambessa without any pretence of legality; or than the Vigilance Committee of San Francisco, when, a year or two ago, they hung men (most of

whom well deserved hanging) with no approach to any other warrant than that supplied by their own views of expediency. The establishment of this principle and its gradual development form the subject-matter of constitutional history. Constitutional history itself is a narrower subject, for it is composed of the writings of a class of authors neither numerous, nor (with a few exceptions) well known. The following observations throw some light on the place which Mr. Hallam occupies in this class.


Our principal writers on Constitutional History may be divided into three classes—the lawyers, the controversialists, and the modern school, of which Mr. Hallam and Sir F. Palgrave are the principal members. The lawyers, for the most part, handled the subject exclusively from a professional point of view. Fortescue, the author of the book *De Laudibus Legum Angliæ*, is the earliest, and by no means the least valuable of them. Indeed, he writes with a liberality of thought and a freedom from technicalities which perhaps entitle his book to take rank rather amongst political treatises than amongst mere law-books, and which certainly make it far more agreeable to read than the more copious and detailed treatise of Lord Coke, who may stand next on the list. His *Institutes* contain a vast quantity of legal and constitutional history; but the unhistorical temper of the times in which he wrote shows itself constantly in the confusion and bewilderment of his books. The *Institutes* were published in the early part of the seventeenth century; but the law which they contain is of all ages, from the time of Edward I. downwards; and it never seems to occur to the

writer that it makes the least difference whether an act was passed in the thirteenth or in the sixteenth century. The whole of the real property law, for example, which forms the first Institute (better known by the familiar title of *Coke upon Lyttleton*) is based all but exclusively upon the feudal system, and therefore upon a state of society which, in Coke's time, had entirely passed away. But this never appears to cross his mind. It never seems to strike him that the constitution of society changed, and that the character of landed property would naturally change with it. His whole view of history seems to be that some cases were before, and some after, the statutes *De Donis* and *Quia Emptores*. The very quaintness of his style shows the indiscriminating temper of his mind in the strangest manner. He maintains, for example, that corruption of blood is warranted by Scripture, because it is said in the 109th Psalm that the children of the wicked are to beg their bread in desolate places. Few things can set the historical and the pre-historical temper in clearer contrast than a comparison between Coke's *Second Institute* and Barrington's *Observations on the Statutes*. The subject of the two books is identical, the difference in temper most curious. Lord Hale's *History of the Common Law* is little more than a fragment, being only an introduction to a larger work, which was sketched out but never completed. It is written in a far more modern spirit than Coke's books, but it turns almost exclusively upon questions of purely technical law, and has very little to do with the great questions of the Royal prerogative and the powers of Parliament. The same observa-



tion applies in part to his *History of the Pleas of the Crown*, which, however, displays extraordinary learning and great capacity. The last of the purely legal writers on this subject to be noticed is Blackstone. His mode of treating the subject of Constitutional Law may be considered to form the complement of the views advocated by Mr. Hallam. He cannot fairly be charged with a want either of learning or of accomplishments; but he was involved in that necessity which so many persons appear to have felt in the last century, of weaving all his statements into a system, which if it could not be deduced from the widest *à priori* grounds, could at least be defended on them. He never appears to see the distinction between the reason why an institution was founded, and the reasons which, after it has been founded, may be alleged in support of it. Why, for example, is the King of England one of the three branches of the Legislature? "Because," says Blackstone, "it is highly necessary for preserving the balance of the Constitution." An excellent reason, no doubt, for maintaining the established state of things, but one which had absolutely nothing whatever to do with its original production. This narrowness, which values a fact only as proof of some preconceived proposition, is the characteristic of all writers who take an exclusively legal view of the national institutions. Blackstone's famous argument upon the Revolution of 1688 is an excellent example of this temper of mind. He views the whole transaction as a precedent, and deduces from it at last the proposition of law, that if the throne is vacant, the Lords and Commons together may fill it.

Such were the peculiarities (more or less distinctly marked) of those who treated our Constitution merely as matter of strict technical law. It is, however, to be observed that the subject was deeply studied throughout the eighteenth century by another set of writers for a very different purpose. These were the controversial partisans who took one or the other side in the great debate between the House of Hanover and the House of Stuart. Several most learned though one-sided books are the monuments of this discussion. They have, as might have been expected, both the merits and the defects of controversial writing. They contain an immense quantity of useful materials, and of untrustworthy conclusions. The histories of Rapin on the one side, and those of Carte and Brady on the other, are the most important of these works. Carte in particular deserves notice, as he was the first person who studied, with a view to historical composition, the original records which contain not only the law reports, but the State papers of early times. Mr. Hallam's works abound with references to his book, and with expressions of admiration for his extraordinary industry and great ability. Barrington's *Observations on the Statutes* and Reeves' *History of English Law* occupy a middle position between the technical lawyers and the controversialists. They are written much in the spirit of Mr. Hallam's works, though Reeves was the highest of high Tories, and, curiously enough, was on that score the subject of the most absurd of all the absurd prosecutions for libel which disgraced the close of the last century. His book is admirably clear and learned.



Such were some of the principal predecessors of Mr. Hallam in the great task upon which he laboured so long and so successfully. In addition to their works, he had the advantage of the labours of several antiquarians who had brought together a great mass of historical documents—particularly Rymer, whose immense collection is to this day one of the most valuable of historical authorities, and Madox, who passed a great part of his life in the strange occupation of forming a digest of the Exchequer records from John to Edward II. Mr. Hallam's great superiority over all his predecessors was due, not so much to his intellectual vigour, or even to the impartiality for which he has been so justly praised, as to the fact that the point of view from which he regarded the whole subject of constitutional law was a higher and more reasonable one than they had been able to seize. When he began to write, Bentham had broken up much of that blind reverence with which English lawyers were formerly in the habit of regarding English law; and the French Revolution had effectually answered the double purpose of putting the Stuart controversy and all that belonged to it at an immeasurable distance from all living interest, and of discrediting *à priori* speculations about the nature of governments *de jure*, as compared with their development *de facto*. The interest in history revived at the same time on both sides of the Channel, by a parallel movement, under the influence of precisely similar causes. Mr. Hallam and M. Guizot were each brought to study the history of their respective countries, by the striking illustration which both had witnessed of the impossibility of

constructing a government for a country without reference to its history. The great peculiarity of Mr. Hallam's works is that he realized more completely than any writer who had gone before him, the fact that, in respect to England, history is the substantive, and law, in whatever form—whether as it is embodied in institutions, or as it exists in mere ordinances—is the adjective, and that without a deep acquaintance with both it is impossible to arrive at satisfactory conclusions about either. No one has brought out with such a variety and aptness of illustration the great truth that all institutions are in their essence relative—that they can be estimated and understood only by one who has acquainted himself with the social state of the people amongst whom they exist. Nor has any one more clearly established the correlative truth (a truth more frequently neglected, at present, than the other), that there is no more powerful agent in determining the moral and social condition of a nation than the institutions which are thus to be studied. The importance of historical inquiry in politics and law is now so popular and so well established, that we are apt to forget that its adoption is both a recent and a remarkable event. That it is so, in fact, any one may satisfy himself by looking into any of the systematic political treatises which were so much in fashion in the last century. No one in the present day would venture upon the statement which met with so much applause when put forward by Montesquieu, that the fundamental principle of a monarchy was honour; and that of a republic, virtue. No one now, except a few uneducated sophists, thinks of talking, at least in this

country, about the inalienable rights of man, and the civil contract which is the basis of society. Nor would any one now talk such nonsense as Lord Camden in the last century, when he rebuked the miserable antiquarians who dared to inquire into the origin of the Constitution, instead of falling down to worship it. Mr. Hallam was amongst the first, and certainly was one of the most effective, adversaries of these and similar errors. Jeremy Bentham, indeed, attacked the consequences which flowed from them with a degree of acuteness almost unexampled, and with a force which frequently degenerated into brutality; but Bentham was not only unjust to his antagonists in refusing them credit to which they were justly entitled, but was himself a dogmatist of the most unsatisfying kind. He triumphantly overthrew Blackstone, and vexed the souls of Lord Eldon and other orthodox lawyers; but his theory of the constitution, and by consequence of the history of England, is not only false, but has simply no relation to fact whatever. He maintained that the English constitution was a nonentity, because it was not to be found in any precise, definite written shape, and that, as a fact, our government was a modified despotism, of which the king was the senior, and the other branches the junior partners, entirely dependent on him for whatever trifling share of power or influence he might be pleased to allow them. Such a theory is no more than a dyspeptic dream, to which a violent person chose to attach a degree of importance to which it was not entitled.

Mr. Hallam's books supply the positive side which was weak in Bentham's political theories. In fixing

the history of the constitution, he gave the true measure both of its excellences and of its defects; which he disentangled from a vast and apparently incongruous heap of materials. Accounts of the general state of society in the middle ages—of the common features of the constitutions which grew up with different results in England, France, Spain, and other countries—of the state of arts and sciences, the growth of towns, and the distribution of the different ranks of society—were all united to form the starting point from which a clear and fair comparative view might be taken of the political condition of England. From this starting point he deduced the history of the gradual development and legal recognition of that set of principles which, taken together, make up the English constitution; and it is impossible to give too much praise to the skill with which the double character of the various events related is kept in view. Mr. Hallam never forgets either that he is relating historical events the character of which depended upon the state of public feeling at the time of their occurrence, or that he is recording legal precedents the importance of which as precedents is even yet by no means extinct. This double aspect invests his books with peculiar importance; their historical character saves them from the technicality of mere law books, and their legal character connects them with practical life, and delivers them from that strange air of fatalism which gives an unwholesome tinge to many modern histories of great celebrity.

It is of course easy to find fault with a great writer, and no doubt there are some real defects in

Mr. Hallam's works, and some apparent ones, which diminish their credit with the present generation. Judges entitled to speak on such a subject say that Mr. Hallam was not so well acquainted with the Canon Law as might have been desirable, and that this prevented him from fully appreciating some of the most powerful of the influences which produced a sort of unity amongst the nations of Europe in the middle ages. It is also difficult to avoid the conclusion that he had less sympathy than an historian ought to have for passion in general, and especially for the religious passions. Thus, in his dissertations on the Civil Wars, he did not adequately distinguish between the principles and the pretexts of the two great parties which divided the nation. He steers a very impartial course between the Roundhead and the Cavalier, but if Cromwell or Charles could read his book, each would probably feel that the strongest part of his case was left untouched, however fairly that which was touched might be dealt with. It may also be objected to Mr. Hallam's whole theory of history, that it proceeded to some extent upon an anachronism—that he antedated the constitution, and ascribed a sympathy for and an appreciation of constitutional arguments to men to whom the whole theory was foreign.

Whatever may be the value of these criticisms, the other side of the question is far the most important. There never was a time when Mr. Hallam's books were more likely to exercise a healthy influence than at present, for there never was a time in which it was more necessary to assert in the strongest way the importance of acts as opposed to

feelings and dispositions, of positive law and definite institutions as opposed to tendencies and formulas which are foolishly described as laws. Whatever Mr. Hallam's defects may have been, he always gives his readers something real, tangible, and solid. He proceeds by fixed rules and principles, and does not call perjury and murder by new names merely because the general character of an historical personage suits the new names better than the old ones. He has a belief in facts, in broad results, in well tried principles ; and in these, as in most other respects, his books are an example eminently worthy of study and imitation by the whole school of romantic and pictorial historians.

January 29, 1859.

III.

CONVENTIONAL MORALITY.

CONVENTIONAL MORALITY is a subject on which every one considers himself at liberty to be indignant and pathetic. A nobleman lately observed in the House of Lords that he thought the moral effect of the Divorce Court was bad. An indignant writer replied that his lordship's regard for morality must be affected, because another nobleman, whose name figured prominently on the list of co-respondents, would sustain no social inconvenience from the circumstance. "Will he," asked the virtuous journalist, with the withering sarcasm appropriate to the occasion—"will he receive one invitation the less? Will he make a less brilliant or frequent appearance in any part of the society in which he moves? Will he be less courted and flattered by ladies with marriageable daughters, or less well received by any one of the innumerable army of toad-eaters? If not, surely Lord R——'s regard for morality must be," &c. &c. Some more eloquence of the same sort ushered in the common form conclusion that, inasmuch as conventional morality does not inflict a particular set of penalties for a particular set of offences, it is no better than hypo-

crisy. The popularity which assertions of this sort have of late years attained, and the influence which they have exercised over some of the most popular of contemporary authors, are significant and important facts, though they are so transient, and so little susceptible of precise statement, that they are almost certain to escape the notice of those who will hereafter study the character and history of the present generation. Whilst the assertions themselves are still before our eyes, it is desirable to examine them, for their incompleteness and inaccuracy are strong proofs of the worthlessness of a large part of that which passes muster as current popular philosophy.


The popular argument is that society cares nothing for morality, because it will forgive any amount of moral obliquity to a man who is rich and lives splendidly. This short statement contains the pith of a mass of irony and invective which popular writers have poured out upon the world for the last thirty years. Mr. Thackeray's life has been passed in ringing the changes on it—sometimes pathetically, sometimes indignantly, sometimes with a forced calmness the effectiveness of which would have been wonderful, if there were any novelty in showing that by ingenious manipulation you can get out of a sovereign gold-leaf enough to paper a room. Short, however, as the statement is, it will be found, on examination, to consist of a false insinuation and several false assertions. The false insinuation is that the fault denounced is peculiar to, or at least specially characteristic of, the upper classes of society. This is by no means true. There is plenty of immorality in the lower walks of life,

but labourers and mechanics are not in the habit of ostracising their intemperate or unchaste companions. A sailor is not sent to Coventry on board ship for getting drunk in harbour, or for having several wives in various parts of the world; and in many parts of the country a young woman's character suffers little from her having an illegitimate child. It would be easy to mention attorneys who have been guilty of fraud and perjury, farmers who are notorious for all the fashionable vices, and shopkeepers who keep a minority of the Ten Commandments, who are nevertheless received into the society of their equals with no sort of hesitation, and who have as little difficulty, in proportion to their means and manners, in finding willing daughters and obsequious mothers, as any member of the peerage whose name is written in the chronicles of Sir Cresswell Cresswell. It is, in fact, the universal habit of all classes of persons to notice but little the morals of their associates in the common intercourse of life, so long as they are not of such a nature as to make that intercourse unpleasant. It is undoubtedly true, that an immoral man who has a great deal to say for himself is more popular in society than a strictly moral man who is excessively dull; but as this is equally true of all classes, it is unfair to make it a special charge against the higher classes.

If the insinuation conveyed by the language under consideration is unfair, its direct assertions are false. They are, that the common practice of all classes shows an indifference to morality, and that its alteration would be desirable in a moral point of view. These assertions are made only because those

who make them have never considered with accuracy what is the relation between society and morality, and by what principles their mutual relations ought to be regulated. Social penalties for immorality form, like all other penalties, a kind of system of criminal law. They ought to be inflicted only on occasions and in degrees in which they have some tendency to prevent particular evils; and the evil which social punishments are intended and calculated to prevent is the disturbance of the comfort of society. They pre-suppose the existence of an average condition, in which people associate together without conscious discomfort—they punish acts which tend to disturb that state of things—and they leave, and ought to leave, untouched and unpunished all acts which do not disturb it.

If this is the true object at which conventional morality aims, it is absurd to blame it for punishing people heavily for acts which are but slightly immoral, whilst it abstains from all notice of other acts which involve guilt of a heinous kind; for it is no more the object of conventional morality than it is the object of criminal law to establish a standard of Christian perfection. The law of the land allows one man with perfect impunity to let his father die of starvation in a ditch, whilst it sends another to gaol for stealing a loaf in order to give his starving parent a meal. Nor is there in this any impropriety; for it is the object of the criminal law to protect property, but it is not its object to make people honour their parents. In the same way, conventional morality does not punish incontinence in a man nor cowardice in a woman, though in the converse




cases it is exceedingly severe. And the reason of this is that the normal repose—the average comfort—of social intercourse rests on the supposition that men are sufficiently brave to speak the truth, and to exact for themselves a certain degree of respect, and women sufficiently chaste to justify their mixing, without suspicion, in the common intercourse of society. The degree of virtue necessary to the maintenance of the average condition of things will, of course, vary widely in different times and countries, but where it is highest it will be indefinitely lower than the highest ideal of goodness attainable there; and thus the enforcement of the sanctions on which it depends will always be warranted by the common sense of the great bulk of mankind, whilst it will be a never-failing object of the contempt of those who think themselves philosophers because they have discovered that gilt cornices are not made of solid gold.

This proves the injustice of asserting that the persons who compose society are indifferent to immorality, because they do not punish it with social excommunication. It is precisely parallel to the injustice of saying that lawyers think there is no harm in ingratitude because it is not the subject of legal punishment. It is perfectly possible to dislike a man and to disapprove of his conduct without avoiding his society, and in a great number of cases it is absolutely necessary to do so. In almost every form of public or semi-public life, in trades, in professions, in every kind of official intercourse, this distinction is recognized and practised. Two barristers may meet constantly in court and on circuit,

they may live in habits of almost confidential intercourse and rough familiarity in their professional capacity; but when their profession is laid aside they may hardly acknowledge each other's existence, and feel the greatest possible amount of mutual contempt and dislike. A similar rule applies between fellow-travellers. For the sake of common convenience, all sorts of people associate with the greatest freedom in an inn or on board of a steam packet, on the sole condition that they are acquainted with the elementary usages of civilized life; but when the momentary casual tie is broken, they immediately become strangers again, and it is only the consciousness that that event will take place so soon that enables them to display so much intimacy for the moment. If an archbishop met with an infidel lecturer in a railway carriage, they might talk comfortably enough about the harvest, the weather, and the newspapers, but it would be absurd to infer from this that the contrast in their religious opinions was a matter of indifference to them.

It never appears to strike the persons who are most glib with the usual sarcasms against conventionality, that tremendous evils would be involved in an attempt to increase in any considerable degree the severity of conventional morality considered as a penal code. It would involve nothing less than the dissolution of almost every social relation; for if we did not take the average comfort of society as the standard by which the enforcement of social penalties is to be regulated, no other standard could be found except that of ideal goodness. It is barely possible to imagine what a society would be like in which any




serious attempt was made to enforce such a standard as this. If it were universally understood that disapproval was to be felt and expressed in substantial forms—not on account of the tendency which the actions disapproved of might have to interfere with the comfort of others, but because they implied that the person performing them fell short of that degree of virtue which his neighbours required of him—the most powerful of all repressive forces would be brought to bear upon human conduct. A system of prohibitions as severe as those of the narrowest religious fanaticism would be brought into constant activity—an activity the more serious because it would be unostentatious, and, to the generality of men, imperceptible.

The moral standard which public opinion would thus enforce would, of necessity, be imperfect in two vital respects. In the first place, it would be exclusively negative. It would take account only of specific bad actions. It could never weigh the influence of circumstances upon individuals, nor could it notice those elements of human nature which are not embraced under the categories of moral good and evil. It would place under a social ban all men of impulsive and original characters, in whom good and bad impulses take determinate forms, and it would tend to foster that passionless mediocrity which makes large bodies of people into moral Laodiceans, neither hot nor cold, and entitled to little other praise or blame than that of being more or less prudent. In the second place, the standard thus raised would not only be negative, but narrow and trivial. It would represent nothing but the average feelings of

the majority, and these average feelings, though good in their way, are despicable if they are regarded as a measure of the moral relations in which men might and ought to stand to each other. We often hear that morality is a simple matter, level to the comprehension of every one; and no doubt there is something that goes by the name of which this is true, but the distance between this something and the ultimate theory of human conduct is infinite. To take the great question hinted at above, what do the conceptions of ordinary men teach us as to what may be called moral set-offs? Was Lord Nelson a better or a worse man than a clerk in a London bank who passed his life in a moral torpor, without sufficient energy or temptation to do anything very right or very wrong? No one has ever settled the question satisfactorily, or even done anything considerable towards stating its elements; but if society were to take upon itself the censorship of private character, it would be dealt with in the narrowest and most mischievous way. Social penalties are indispensable for the comparatively humble purpose of maintaining social decency and comfort; but they would be mischievous in the extreme if they were inflicted on the principle that the common opinions of average men ought to mould the characters of mankind. It is one of the great evils of the day that they have already far too strong an influence in that direction.

Society would have to inflict these penalties without satisfactory evidence, and without any reasonable form of procedure. The penalty would be social excommunication; the evidence, popular report. Such



a man, it would be said, has been unchaste, such another ungrateful, a third is a spendthrift, and a fourth an Atheist; therefore, let all who regard the decencies of life join in abstaining from all intercourse with them. Under the present system, which is considered lax and hollow, such assertions would not be regarded. Except in some case of well-ascertained and notorious scandal, society does not interfere, because its comfort is not disturbed, but if it took up the function which the attacks made upon it imply that it ought to take up, it would have to examine such charges, and to decide upon them according to the impression made by loose gossip and tattle.

The inconsistency and weakness of sarcastic and sentimental writers is well illustrated by the fact that those who inveigh most bitterly against the hypocrisy of conventional morality are so far from being in favour of more strictness, that they would wish for more indulgence, and suppose that the course which they take is likely to procure it. Their sneers always fall into forms like these:—"You are terribly virtuous against the poor woman who breaks the seventh commandment, but you have nothing to say to my lord who tempts her to do so. The starving wretch who steals to satisfy his wants you call a thief; but if a man gambles in stocks and shares, you are only too proud to see him at your table. If your servant tells you a single falsehood, you discharge him; but the lawyer who makes his fortune by coining lies and selling them is your honoured guest." The ingenuous persons who preach this doctrine with such charitable acrimony are, in reality, scandalized,

not at the impunity of the successful, but at the punishment of the weak. They have no wish to hurt the lawyer, the stock-jobber, or the adulterer, but they are shocked at the hardships inflicted on humbler offenders. They do not see that the only practical effect of their outcry would be to increase the stringency of the social code against persons whom at present it does not affect, without relieving those whom it at present punishes. They worship equality whilst they are indifferent to liberty. "Let us all be slaves to society together," is their sentiment—"we do not, indeed, love slavery, but we hate exceptions." It never occurs to their narrow and undisciplined minds that any arrangements can have partial objects, and that it is no more the object of conventional morality to form human character than it is the object of parish rates to pay the interest on the National Debt. It is as absurd to argue that society is indifferent to moral good and evil because it does not visit all moral offences with a degree of punishment proportioned to their moral enormity, as it would be to argue that the commissioners of a turnpike trust had no sense of religion or of architectural beauty, because they took tolls for the purpose of maintaining the roads, whilst the parish church fell into decay for want of repairs.

August 13, 1859.

IV.

PHILANTHROPY.

It might be supposed upon *à priori* grounds that no occupation could be nobler in itself, or more elevating in its effects on the characters of those who pursued it, than disinterested efforts to improve the condition of others. A lifetime exclusively devoted to philanthropy might be expected to be as well spent, and to produce, as its final result, as noble a specimen of a human being as any career that could be mentioned. Our time and country afford better opportunities than any other of judging of the degree in which this ideal is realized. A considerable and conspicuous class amongst us do actually pass the greater part of their lives in philanthropic employments. The number of societies which aim at the removal of every kind of human ailment, and the alleviation of every sort of unavoidable misfortune, is incalculable. Some of them dispose of revenues equal to those of a minor Continental State. All find a vast amount of occupation for the thoughts and the practical energies of many men, and of still more women, in the upper and middle classes of society. That such associations do produce a vast amount of good, there can be no doubt at all. They prevent a

great deal of suffering, and open to an immense number of persons modes of escape from the consequences of their own guilt and folly. They also enable the rich not only to show sympathy to the poor, but to study the evils which poverty entails, with a degree of care and intelligence probably unexampled in the history of modern Europe. It is unnecessary to dwell upon the merits of these institutions. They are deservedly praised at home and envied abroad as some of the most enduring and characteristic of our national claims to greatness.


There is, however, another question connected with our philanthropic associations which the contemplation of them suggests, and which it is by no means so easy to answer favourably as that which has reference to their immediate effects. How do they influence those who manage them? Are those whose lives are passed in philanthropic undertakings the best and noblest specimens of humanity supplied by our age and nation? Probably no one would seriously answer the question in the affirmative. It is indeed a false and vulgar cry which affirms that those who concern themselves most strongly for charity abroad care least for charity at home—that you may know the children of a lady who interests herself about schools and reformatories by their ignorance and naughtiness—or that a lively concern for the blacks in South Africa is generally accompanied by indifference to the homeless poor in London. To assert that a particular state of facts is true, because, if it were true, it would present an effective contrast, is as contemptible as it is common; but this is quite consistent with the soundness of the

common sentiment which asserts that philanthropists are far from holding the same rank amongst human beings that philanthropy might be supposed to hold amongst human occupations. No one expects that a person principally occupied in philanthropy will be very wise, very sympathetic, or very large-minded. We are rather apt to associate the name of a philanthropist with a certain narrowness of understanding, and not unfrequently with a good deal of coldness of temper.

One reason of this is, that an exclusive devotion to philanthropy, as it is usually understood, fosters a low view of life. Philanthropic undertakings, to be successful, must aim at specific purposes, and must be undertaken by the combination of a considerable number of persons. When set on foot, they are apt to assume, in the eyes of those who are connected with them, a degree of importance which they do not really deserve. It is one of the disadvantages of the intense love of business and active life which is the special characteristic of all classes in this country, that a man's hobby soon comes to appear to him the one thing needful. Whether it is education, or reformatories, or missions to the heathen to which he devotes himself, he gets to look at every part of life in relation to his object, and to estimate its value accordingly. Philanthropists thus come to look upon their fellow-creatures, not as men and women, but as beings capable of being sent to school, to prison, or to church—of being, in some form or other, restrained and remodelled. For many obvious reasons such theories get the character of being especially safe and orthodox, for they fall in admirably with the popular

Manicheism which regards human nature as a *malum in se*. It is needless to say that this is not the view of life which will lead people to discharge its great functions in the temper in which they should be discharged. To acquire and appreciate that temper it is necessary that men should sedulously engage themselves in positive pursuits—that they should enter upon some of the great careers of life, and try to obtain excellence in them. Those, however, who do this are not usually the persons who are most anxious to recast the characters of others into any uniform type. They see the imperfection of commonly received opinions, and the stunted character of the ordinary ideals of goodness, too strongly to be very keen about their indefinite multiplication. Practical philanthropy, as understood in our own time and country, often appears to be based on an unhesitating confidence in the truth of some small definite theory as to what men ought to be and how they ought to feel.

Probably there is no reason in the nature of things why this should be so, but it is comparatively easy to see how it has come to be so. The great distinctive feature of philanthropists is intense pity for wretchedness. They do not pity people for being wicked, so much as for those forms of wickedness which make them physically wretched. With pride, avarice, and worldliness they wage no war; but drunkenness, ignorance, and improvidence enlist their keenest sympathies. Thus they are always in danger of acting as if they held a theory, which thrown into a dogmatic form, would consist of little more than the one doctrine that to be uncomfortable is the great



evil of life, and that to rid people of their discomforts is the highest vocation to which men can address themselves. This is simply a generalization from the career of any ordinary well-to-do Englishman. Moderate order, moderate comfort, moderate success—the attainment on the part of one person in a hundred of that sort of position which the other ninety-nine attain without conscious effort—is the kind of object which philanthropists seem to propose, not to themselves, but to their neighbours, as the result of the benevolent exertions in which their lives are passed. They are quite contented that people should endure the ordinary evils of life. That they should be ill, if there are hospitals to receive them in illness—that they should work late and early at all sorts of unpleasant tasks, so long as they can read, write, and cypher—in a word, that they should experience all the diseases so long as they are provided with the medicines of life, appears to these pious and amiable people an arrangement with which it would not only be useless to quarrel, but at which it would be impious to repine.

This keen anxiety to reduce the amount of suffering in the world, though the general necessity of its existence is admitted, would be strange if it were not so common. It shows conclusively how much even the most pious and amiable of ordinary English people have fallen into the habit of caring about the accidents whilst they are comparatively indifferent to the substance of life. True, they say, we are, and must remain, sinners and dying men; we must expect illness, the loss of friends, poverty, and old age; we must expect to see the great mass of men

walking along the broad, and not the narrow path. What, then, remains for us to do? Let us pity and console them—let us, if possible, reclaim them from being sinners at all. But if that enterprise is hopeless, let us at least rack our ingenuity to make them comfortable and not miserable sinners. It would be wrong to say a word which could prevent a single kind action, but it is right to look upon the other side of the question, for it is of vast importance. Like many other words, the word “comfort” is illustrated by its etymology. It means consolation, relief, the alleviation of suffering; it implies that the background of life is melancholy and painful, and that the best thing that can be done for men is to make it a little less gloomy and unsuccessful than it naturally is. This view is more or less assumed by almost all philanthropic schemes; but it hardly needs to be proved that it is petty and cowardly. It is a fatal mistake to look upon life as an evil which can be converted into a good by any amount of comfort. It may be humane and excellent in a man to devote himself to pursuits involving great self-denial in order to increase the comforts of his fellow-creatures, the practice is not without risk, and the risk incurred is that the objects of his kindness may come to misapprehend their own position in the world. Instead of feeling heartily ashamed of their past lives, and anxiously desirous to regain something infinitely more valuable than all the comfort in the world—a good conscience, and some perception of the real objects of human life—they will look upon themselves as people who have been got out of a scrape which was rather the fault of circumstances than




their own, and from which they have been rescued by an alteration in their circumstances. If we compare this conclusion with the general character of the teaching of the most zealous advocates of philanthropic schemes, their theory and practice will be found to present a contrast not the less instructive because it is essentially amiable, and frequently involves considerable self-denial.

August 20, 1859.

V.

THE WEALTH OF NATURE.

DISCONTENTMENT with the permanent arrangements of life, and a restless longing to alter them, are weaknesses which it is very difficult to distinguish from that rational desire to reform abuses which this age of the world is apt to claim as its special title to the admiration of mankind. That society is unjust, that its maxims are false and hollow, that success is not proportioned to merit—that knavery, folly, quackery, and every other species of deception, are apt to triumph whilst hundreds of good and wise men pass through life hardly known and scantily rewarded—is the substance of a vast proportion of the verses which indignation is constantly writing in all countries, and nowhere with greater assiduity than in our own. The removal of many long-standing abuses, the opening of many new careers to ability, and the destruction of many distinctions which, rightly or not, were regarded as invidious, have given a sort of plausibility to much of the language which is so common upon these topics. Still it is for the most part unfounded, and the disposition to adopt it, which unhappily appears to be gaining ground amongst us, is mean, selfish, and




cowardly. Grumbling is a safety-valve, the use of which, up to a certain point, can be grudged to no one; but when people come to attach serious importance to the topics on which grumblers most frequently insist, they have taken the most important step on the road which leads to a grovelling degeneracy.

The commonest of all this family of common-places is that which asserts that the battle in the varied careers of life is not to the strong, and that success is an inadequate test of merit. Of the persons who are in the habit of promulgating this opinion, there is hardly one who does not repeat it with disgust and contempt. It admits, however, of a cheerful interpretation. If we read the ordinary remark as an assertion that there are many strong men whose victories are never known, and many good men whose merits are little noticed, we are led to the conclusion that the world is richer in such men, and that the general level of worth stands higher than we should have supposed. When some eminent person upon whom much of the national welfare seemed to depend is taken from us, it is surely a comfort to think that our prospect of an efficient successor is not confined within the narrow limits of those who have obtained a definite official recognition of distinction, but that the supply of men of merit in every walk of life is not only fully equal to, but indefinitely greater than, the demand. It cannot be seriously contested that such a state of things must always be highly beneficial to the nation in which it exists. This would be saying that it is no advantage to a merchant to have a larger amount of capital than the

usual demands of his business absolutely require. If a full share of employment, dignity, and money were allotted to every able man in the precise ratio of his ability, society, like a dandy of the last century, would carry the most valuable part of its estate on its back in lace and jewels.

It is, in fact, impossible to exaggerate the importance of the social functions discharged by able men whose abilities are superior to the reputation which they earn. Some of these services must from their nature be obscure, whilst others are too indefinite to be capable of earning such rewards as society has to give; but their aggregate value is unspeakably great. Of those which are obscure some have obtained a picturesque and typical glory. Every one has been called upon to admire the curates of country villages, and the obscure philanthropists who live lives of devoted benevolence amongst the class—frequently an obscure one—to which they belong. But whatever is picturesque and affecting is sure to have ample justice done to it when it is discovered; and such occupations as these, whatever may be their moral grandeur, frequently do not require a corresponding degree of intellectual power. A less trite but not a less important observation arises on a class of persons to whom comparatively little interest is usually attracted—those who discharge obscure tasks which it requires rare mental power to discharge well, and which are but little noticed, however well they may be discharged. The number of such tasks is little known, but we cannot open our eyes without observing traces of them in every direction. There is no profession and no walk of life in which they



do not occur. A highly artificial state of society has no doubt its evils, but it has one great advantage. It bears witness in all directions to the vast amount of skill, patience, and self-denial which is expended upon the common affairs of life by men as little remembered a few years after their death as those who built the Pyramids. The mere existence of civilized States throws a light upon the ingenuity, the ability, and the unwearied industry of man comparable only to that which geology throws upon the history of natural phenomena. Let any one think of the intellectual level of that large proportion of mankind who are either idle, stupid, or grossly self-indulgent, and he will hardly fail to conclude that hundreds of millions of such persons would not have made this country what it is in thousands of ages. What, then, must have been the aggregate ability of those who, in less than thirty generations, have changed the England of King Alfred into the England of Queen Victoria? Few of their names are known at all to the world at large—an infinitely small number are known out of the particular sphere to which they belonged.

Passing, however, from a consideration so wide as to be hardly manageable, it may be observed that every walk of life furnishes abundant instances of obscure labours quite as arduous as many of those which have been rewarded by permanent fame, and much more important. The poet Gray will probably be long remembered. The *Elegy* and the *Ode on Eton College* have a fair chance of lasting as long as the language; yet most of us have known men who were, in all probability, much superior to

Gray, and whose names are not known to fifty people out of their own immediate circle. Gray was learned and accomplished, but how many men far more learned and quite as accomplished are scattered over the country now in colleges, rectories, and country-houses, where no one concerns himself about their accomplishments. A man's books or poems are only a specimen, generally a small one, of the general habit of his mind. The habit exists in hundreds of cases, and produces great but obscure effects, which are traceable only in their remote consequences by a careful observer. A country squire who might, if he had devoted himself to such pursuits, have written some thirty or forty immortal stanzas in the course of a lifetime, diffuses a certain refinement over the society in which he lives, trains family of children to habits of delicacy and honour, wins the affections and mitigates the hardships of the labourers on his estate, and, in a hundred ways, sets up a standard of taste and feeling which may mark the character of the neighbourhood for years together. In the more rugged walks of life, the number of monuments of skill and power condemned by their nature to obscurity are more frequent. Dim professional labours, forgotten by all but the members of the profession, and appreciated by but few of them, testify in great numbers to the profusion of power which exists in the world. How many persons ever heard the name of *Comyn's Digest*? but it is a work which shows powers of analysis and arrangement—to say nothing of perseverance—which, if they had been devoted to making canals or railways, would have furnished an inexhaustible subject of admira-

tion to biographers and popular lecturers. If any one would sift the enormous mass of knowledge which lies buried in blue books, he would find in many cases that the most repulsive matter had been sought out and set in order by unknown hands with a method, precision, and accuracy, which would have made the fortune of a historian. In hospitals and law-courts displays of skill daily take place, without attracting any remark at all, which could have been acquired only by a union of moral, mental, and physical qualifications fully equal to those displayed in many of the events which all mankind agree to consider memorable.

Nor is this all; not only is it true that actions which men willingly forget are often as arduous as those which they enthusiastically remember, but it is also true that many actions which would be gladly remembered are constantly forgotten. The Indian empire is perhaps the most marvellous proof of this that the history of the world can supply. Who reduced all those provinces to peace and order? Who welded them into one mass? How were they conquered and reconquered? And how shall we be able to rule them now? The world knows the show names well enough, and some of the more obscure ones came to light during the late mutiny; but how many of them have passed unknown? A man died a short time since who, at twenty-five years of age, with no previous training, was set to govern a kingdom, with absolute power, and who did govern it so wisely and firmly that he literally changed a wilderness into a fruitful land. Probably no one who reads these lines will guess to whom

Gen. Grant Duff -

in L. Stephens's life of Sir J. Duff, 1848, p.


they allude, and indeed the statement would fit several different persons. Nor are such cases confined to India. The British empire itself, whatever may be its defects, was not put together nor held together without much skill and labour. How many heart-burnings must have been soothed, how many jealousies composed, how much care and experience must have been exerted in negotiation, in legislation, in persuasion, before colonies equal in size to great European States could be brought to govern themselves, and to stand to their mother-country in a relation which has hardly a parallel in history. Yet we have no Solon or Lycurgus to credit with either India or Canada. Ingenious and curious inquirers might find out, if any one cared to know, how these things came to be; but to the world at large they are and always will be anonymous works, whose authors will soon be undiscoverable even by inquirers into the curiosities of politics.

Perhaps, however, the indefinite services which are rendered to society by able but unknown men are even more remarkable than their marked but obscure services. Fame gilds the elevations of a tableland, not the heights of a mountain. The one famous person whom the world worships is almost always the representative of a number of persons of much the same calibre, of whom nothing, or next to nothing, is either known or remembered. Hardly any man is great enough to be reduced to the sad necessity of living constantly with his inferiors. If he were, it is hard to conceive how he could be great, for he would be destitute of that which is infinitely the most powerful of all instruments of mental development — free intercourse with equals and

superiors. Those who are obscure, or altogether unknown, are thus, to a great extent, partners in the fame of their more successful friends; and it should be observed that the obscurity of the majority is absolutely necessary to the formation of the atmosphere which is essential to the development of the minority who attain celebrity. The fact that a man has obtained a conspicuous social position is almost sure to deprive him to some extent of his ease and simplicity; and if all those with whom he is intellectually on a level were embarrassed with a reputation and position of the same kind, their intercourse could hardly escape a certain degree of stiffness and constraint. Thus, the great reserve fund of ability which healthy societies contain acts beneficially on society at large, by giving the tone and fixing the standard recognized by that small number of persons who succeed not only in attaining intrinsic greatness, but in convincing the world at large that they have attained it. The unseen influence which is thus exerted by men of whose very existence many well-informed persons are unaware, can hardly be appreciated by those who have not had an opportunity of observing it. From the nature of the case it is difficult to quote illustrations, but instances sometimes occur in which services of this sort have been commemorated by those who had the opportunity of appreciating their importance. Mr. Alexander Knox was an instance in the last generation; perhaps Mr. Stirling may be said to have supplied another in our own.*

* See for an example of the same sort the *Life of Mr. Henry Lushington*, by Mr. Venables, prefixed to his *Essays*. They were reviewed in the *Saturday Review* of August 20, 1859.

It may be said that, however beneficial it may be to society at large, that there should exist a large number of men whose merits have not obtained full recognition, such a state of things implies hardship upon the persons concerned. This observation proceeds upon a false estimate both of the facts of the case and of the functions of society. The utmost that can be said of the injustice of society to meritorious persons is, that they get less fame and less money than they think they ought to get, and that other people, with less merit, get more. That merit is in a man's favour, as far as it goes, is incontestable. A well-connected, meritorious man will get on better than a well-connected man destitute of merit; but it is surely matter of great congratulation that there is not an invariable alliance between prosperity and desert, and it is perhaps even more fortunate that it is not the province of society at large to gauge the exact merits of its members, and to assign them precedence accordingly. If this were so, the result would be, not only a social slavery of the most degrading kind, but the introduction of a universal system of mammon-worship, such as the world has happily never seen. If society affected to class people according to their merits, the poor would not only be, but would feel that they always must be, the miserable slaves of the rich. At present, a poor man can feel that no one but an insolent fool would despise his poverty; but it would be far otherwise if poverty and misfortune were the sure marks of crime or folly. The vainglory, the worldliness, the brutal hardness of heart, which would follow from an attempt at such a classification cannot be conceived.




As things stand now, we have the satisfaction of knowing that no one need be ashamed of his condition in life, because his presence in it proves nothing against him ; and of perceiving in all directions traces of skill and power which furnish a proof as cheering as it is irrefragable that there are amongst us men who ennoble nearly every walk of life, and who would have ennobled any.

September 24, 1859.

VI.

JOHN BULL.


OUR national nickname is perhaps more widely identified with the English people than any of the other manifestations of our character, unless, indeed, it be our national oath. Not only is it true that to Frenchmen, Germans, and Americans the people of England are collectively known as John Bull, but the name is felt to give a real insight into the character of those whom it is intended to describe. Nicknames, like caricatures, are worthless unless they are humorous; but, if they are humorous, their value is out of all proportion to their ostensible importance. Under certain limitations, it is perfectly true to say that the most elaborate treatise teaches us less than a really good nickname or caricature. Indeed, one of the most popular of contemporary writers—Mr. Carlyle—has constructed an entire theory of literature upon this principle. His habit of insisting upon the necessity of having an eye instead of mere spectacles—of “looking into the soul” of things and men, and of painting his characters instead of describing them—are all ways of indicating that real knowledge of mankind is derived rather from



the imagination than from the understanding. That this habit gives wonderful life and power to his writings is unquestionable. Robespierre and Danton, Johnson, Walter Scott, Frederick the Great, and his father, are all represented by him in a pictorial manner, and each portrait seems to live and move; but the question always remains, whether the picture is as like *the* original as it is like *some* original—whether the person produced, who is unquestionably a real, living man, is the same person who originally passed under his name. That a real Mirabeau did actually live and die in the latter part of the last century in France, is undoubtedly true. That there is in Mr. Carlyle's writings a real living Mirabeau, claiming to be the same person, is equally true; but whether that claim is well-founded, is quite a different question. Sculptors sometimes say that they find their statues in the block, and they certainly do find something; but they do not always find the particular thing for which they look. It is the same in the case of popular nicknames. They embody a vivid conception of the persons to whom they are applied; but it is not always a true, and seldom or never a complete one. Sydney Smith's controversy with the late Bishop of Gloucester fixed upon that respectable prelate the name of "Simon;" and though the name itself is not only inoffensive, but apostolic, it does convey a sort of image of the man to whom it was applied which gives a pungent notion of him even to those who never saw him. It would, however, be a great mistake to suppose that Dr. Monk had not more in him than a fitness for the name of Simon, or even that there were not elements in

his character which were in no way related to that name.

Such being the strength and the weakness of nick-names, what are the limitations under which the name of John Bull may be taken as an account of the English people? Every one knows what John Bull is, and at the present day, at all events, every print-shop will afford abundant evidence upon the subject. John Bull is a huge, thick-set yeoman, dressed in a cut-away coat and leather breeches, and a pair of top-boots. Beef and beer are his diet, he carries a cudgel in his hand, and an enormous bull-dog follows at his heels. All this is a humorous way of expressing the sentiment that we Englishmen are a straightforward, hearty race, paying our way and caring for nobody—that we are the most determined and strong-willed of mankind—that we love substance, and suspect, and even dislike, external show—that we please ourselves, with perfect indifference to the opinions of others—and that we habitually regard the world in which we live with hearty, but surly, geniality and good humour. That there is a certain rollicking resemblance to English society in this portrait is no doubt true; indeed, the strongest lines of the English national character are so broad and plain that it would be almost impossible for any hand, however unskilful or inexperienced, to fail entirely to reproduce them. But it is impossible to sum up in any single ideal personage so large a matter as the character of a great nation; and though the conventional John Bull is a person whom most Englishmen would like, and whom a large number of us would resemble in




several points, there is a vast deal more to be said of the country than is expressed in those emphatic monosyllables.

The principal points of resemblance between the caricature and the original are the determination, the force, and the dogged resolution (in relation to which bull must be interpreted to mean bull-dog) which the caricature reflects, and which the nation unquestionably possesses; and these are just the sort of broad characteristics which it is impossible to overlook.

On the other hand, the independence of mind which is implied in the idea of John Bull is found in the generality of Englishmen, only *sub modo*. The geniality*—to use a distasteful word not easily paraphrased or replaced—is by no means universal amongst us, and there are a variety of other important features of the national character respecting which the caricature is entirely silent. The John Bull view of the English character assumes, like all other nicknames, that the groundwork of the character is given. The typical person is supposed to have chosen and entered on his path in life. He is no longer young, in mind or body, but has fixed principles upon the subjects which come in his way, and is occupied in reducing them to practice. This excludes at least one important part of a man's life. The determination, conscious or unconscious, of the objects for which, and of the principles on which, we are to live, is perhaps the weightiest problem which we ever have to entertain. A man fairly launched on the affairs of the world may be as

See *Essay IX.*, p. 89, post.

determined and decisive as possible, and yet, in the matter of forming his general conception of life and adopting the principles by which it is to be worked out, he may be the most puny, commonplace, and gregarious of mankind. In order to decide whether the English nation really possesses that sturdy independence which is usually ascribed to it, it is necessary to keep this distinction in view; and though there can be no doubt of the fact that Englishmen fairly embarked on almost any pursuit usually act with vigour on their own judgment, and exercise that judgment with spirit, it is to be feared that we are far from being equally independent and original in the formation of our characters and in the adoption of our principles. The great energy of the national character in the one direction contributes powerfully to enfeeble it in the other. The foundation of originality and independence of mind on the large scale must be laid in the early stages of life; and it requires a training which parents are not likely to give, if their own minds are absorbed in the energetic prosecution of the common affairs of life. With rare exceptions, such occupations are not only inconsistent with leisure and reflectiveness, but are, in a sense, adverse to them. A busy, active man of business likes to see his boy work while he works and play while he plays, but he cannot bear to see him think, or, as such parents often call it, dream and loiter. Yet meditation, solitude, and reflection are absolutely indispensable, not only to richness and beauty of character, but to energy in all the higher spheres of action; and there seems to be some reason to fear that the minority of really



thoughtful persons, whose minds are habitually turned to the higher regions of reflection and feeling, is in the present state of society smaller than usual. If this is so, it is a great deduction from the general sturdiness and independence of the national character, for it shows that those qualities are characteristic only of its lower functions.

The conception of John Bull entirely omits one very important feature of English thought closely related to its alleged independence. The suggestion of the caricature is that speculation and theory are nonsense, and that John Bull is a man of action who despises such things. If it were possible to tie a shoe or to add up a butcher's bill without thought and without theory, there might be something in this; but as Englishmen in general are not absolute idiots, it is a mistake to suppose that, as a nation, we reject the use of our reason, and confine ourselves to the indulgence of our passions. The truth is, that inasmuch as we live in an old and complicated state of society, and inasmuch as the most intelligent part of the community receives an education which, with all its defects, is, as far as it goes, perhaps the most searching and thorough in the world, educated Englishmen have an exceedingly high standard of the kind and degree of proof by which their assent is to be commanded. The energy of character which belongs to almost all of us in one form or another, fastens the attention of those who think at all to the great subjects of speculation—to theology, to politics, and to science, but especially to the two first. It follows from the combination of a determination to think upon these subjects, with

the habit of requiring proof of a substantial and convincing kind as a condition of assent to what is said about them, that there is amongst the educated classes of this country an amount of doubt, of suspension of opinion, of dissatisfaction with every sort of established creed—and, above all, of aversion to every opinion which sets up for being better or newer than its neighbours—which would immeasurably surprise those who are acquainted only with the calm indifference of manner which fits every educated Englishman like his skin. To men of active habits this state of mind is not agreeable. It irritates them to see persons of inferior attainments proceeding on their course of life with confidence, whilst steady and consistent conduct is made greatly more difficult for themselves by their sense of the insecurity of the foundations of many of the opinions on which they are compelled habitually to act. The combination of these feelings gives rise to an orthodox scepticism, which, though most characteristic of Englishmen, is certainly not included in the conception of John Bull. With a strong sense of the difficulties of their own position, and a determination at least equally strong to avoid being thrown out of the management of common affairs, educated Englishmen are much in the habit of adopting for practical purposes principles to which they only half assent; and of acting on them with a vigour which proceeds quite as much from resentment against their own doubts as from conviction of the truth of their own premisses. This can be reconciled with the popular view of John Bull only by the unpleasant assumption that his sturdiness and decision are not altogether unaffected.

What is called geniality is a prominent feature in the ordinary conception of John Bull's character. The word is a new and an unlucky one; but it may be taken to point to that good humour and power of enjoyment which is always asserted to exist alongside of the external bluntness and coldness of English manners. English manners, it is admitted, are dry and cold. English habits are by no means remarkably social, but nowhere, it is asserted, will you find more sincerity, more warmth and depth of feeling, or stronger family affections. There is a completeness about this representation which is in itself suspicious. Nothing is more common than to assert the existence of an agreeable concealed quality, because, if it existed, it would present an effective contrast to a disagreeable apparent one. In novels this practice is so common that when a person is introduced who behaves with extreme brutality, it is morally certain that, a little further on, he will be found to act with romantic generosity. In real life people are not made on this plan. Manner, as far as it is any evidence of character, is evidence of a character corresponding with itself. Whatever may be the case in novels, a harsh and rough manner in real life raises a presumption of a harsh and rough disposition; and a cold, severe manner is generally associated with a cold and severe disposition. This being so, it is hardly conceivable that any one should seriously maintain that the English are a joyous people. That we have a passion for success—that is, for producing the results (principally external and visible results) towards which our ordinary occupations are directed—is true, and it is also

true that our views of religion and morality not only justify this temper of mind, but make a virtue of it ; but this is the character of an ambitious rather than of a joyous people. To an Englishman's mind the choice of Hercules is a choice between idleness and energy—between putting out the talents to usury and squandering them or hiding them in a napkin. With others the choice is between pleasure and ascetic piety. The world is either to be enjoyed or to be renounced. We never think of renouncing, and seldom try to enjoy it.

Even with respect to family life, which is usually spoken of as the strongest justification of the theory that the English character is genial, much is to be said which is generally left unnoticed. Affection, in the sense of an intense interest in the welfare of friends and relations, is a universal characteristic of all the great modern nations, and its existence here cannot be looked upon as specially characteristic of this country ; but if by affection is meant positive pleasure in the society of friends and relations, it may be questioned whether we are more affectionate than our neighbours. It is true that the heads of families in the upper and middle classes of society spend their evenings at home instead of going to the theatre or visiting their friends ; but the lower classes have a passion for public-houses, and a certain sluggishness which often accompanies energy has quite as much to do with the domestic habits of their social superiors as warmth of family affection. Many men pass their evenings with their wives and daughters, not from any sentimental reason, but substantially because they prefer reading the newspaper drowsily

before the fire to taking the trouble of going out to gossip. The choice may be reasonable enough, but it proves little as to affection.

In some respects we are a less domestic people than either Frenchmen or Germans. In this country two families never live in one house, nor is it possible to conceive a greater readiness than all of us show to give up home, country, friends and relations for any enterprise which promises excitement or advancement in life. A French family will hang about its native place for generations, putting up with almost any inconvenience for the sake of doing so. But when the sons and daughters grow up, the members of an English family scatter like a shell when it bursts, and though they may retain a hearty mutual good will, and a thorough readiness to make sacrifices if necessary for each other's service, they seem to think it a matter of course to go to opposite ends of the earth on a moment's notice. All these points are modifications of the geniality and warmth of heart which John Bull's external bluntness is meant to suggest. It should be fully understood that the bluntness and gravity are real, and not merely external, and that the English conception of social relations, though not unkind and very strong, is very grave and not particularly sweet.

Some of the most important features in the character of the largest class of Englishmen are entirely wanting in John Bull. He is always depicted as a yeoman, and he is, in fact, the representative of the well-to-do, independent part of the population. He gives but an inadequate notion of the character of the mass of the people. In the lower, as well

as in the middle and higher, classes of Englishmen, there is abundance of determination and energy, and the keenest possible sense of personal dignity, except, indeed, where vice or extreme poverty has impaired it; but day-labourers and mechanics are extremely gregarious, and have as little desire as they have at present aptitude for the exercise of any considerable degree of independence, either of mind or of conduct. They are, also, a much more sensitive and thin-skinned race than a superficial observer would suppose. There is no class of men in the world more keenly alive to ridicule or contempt. They are, also, more excitable than the wealthier classes; and as soon as they begin to acquire the rudiments of education, they display a rhetorical habit of mind, which is very unlike the conventional conception of John Bull. Nothing can less resemble that well-known figure than the temper of a set of mechanics collected to discuss trade or politics, or to listen to some popular preacher. The audience on such occasions always displays the passion which is characteristic of uninstructed minds for rhetorical fervour combined with verbal logic. The relish for shrewd mother wit, plain language, and homely experience, is the characteristic of a highly-cultivated understanding, and, though claimed for the mass of Englishmen by the John-Bull view of our national character, does not really belong to them.

November 26, 1859.

VII.

PHYSICAL STRENGTH.]

THE objects of a widely-extended popular desire generally come to be valued not so much on account of their intrinsic importance, as because they are essential parts of the popular ideal, for the time being, of an eminent or admirable character. Thus, at one time, the popular favour is to be won only by ascetic and monastic virtues. At others, ability in and for itself attracts a degree of admiration disproportioned to its just claims on the esteem or admiration of mankind. So the sort of ability which public feeling delights to honour is not always the same. The tide sometimes sets in favour of practical, and sometimes in favour of speculative, talent; and it would be difficult to lay down any general rule which would enable those who take an interest in such things to predict whether one set of qualities, or another of an entirely opposite character, would meet with general admiration in any given time and country. Popular admiration is, in fact, granted, not so much to particular qualities in and for themselves, as to imaginary persons in whom the virtues which the age specially admires are exemplified in the fullest degree. Thus, when asceticism is in the highest favour, it is not the case that any large portion of mankind actually grasp and adopt the ascetic theory of morals.

but they are haunted by an undefined notion that people who do, in the ordinary intercourse of life, adopt and act upon that standard of conduct must be great, wonderful, and worthy of veneration. The natural consequence is, that the quality admired is viewed pictorially, and not analytically, and is worshipped instead of being understood.

A forcible illustration of this is given by the sentiment which of late years has become at once powerful and common respecting physical strength, and all that belongs to it. All the younger generation of writers of fiction have, for many years past, been trying to excite and foster the sentiment that power of character, in all its shapes, goes with goodness, and that there is so intimate a connection between the various departments of life, physical and moral, that strength of mind may be expected to be closely connected with, or may, perhaps, be said to be reflected in, strength of body. This notion is closely connected with many of the most important of the opinions which are at present entertained respecting the great standing controversies of life. It is connected with what may be called the social as opposed to the ascetic conception of morals, with the disposition to look upon life as a whole, as opposed to the temptation—if it is to be so regarded—to cut it into parts, of which some only are susceptible of sacred associations, whilst others are and must always remain common and unclean. It is, perhaps, not altogether unrelated to the materialistic theory which views the soul as a function of the body, and expects to attain the power of assigning the physical conditions of mental greatness.

The body may obviously be looked upon in either of two lights. It may be regarded as an essential part of the man—as the outward and visible part of himself, containing and constituting, with its various powers and qualities, some of the most important elements of his character. Or, on the other hand, it may be regarded as something radically distinct from the man himself—a mere material instrument of the immaterial essence which properly constitutes the individual—a clog, necessary indeed to the action of the soul, but in its essence a mere appendage to it, and a somewhat degrading one. The popular estimate, as reflected in popular literature, of the importance and value of physical gifts, will depend almost entirely upon the degree in which the first or the second of these ideals lies at the bottom of popular feeling on the subject. If the former prevails, the popular notion of a great and good man will be a person of great physical and mental endowments, all harmonized together, and all directed towards good ends. If the second is the current theory, popular writers will delight in contrasting mental strength with physical weakness, and in showing how the mind, beset with a thousand difficulties from the imperfections of the machine with which it is associated, can, nevertheless, triumph over them all. There can be little doubt which of these two is the popular view in the present day. Almost every popular writer, from the one or two who are really great down to the crowd who merely show which way the popular taste sets, delights to make the body not the agent, but the partner, of the mind; and each, accordingly, invests his heroes

every imaginable bodily perfection. It would be easy to fill pages with descriptions, taken from novelists, of models of physical force who have acted as heroes. Who does not know all about the "short, crisp, black hair," the "pale, but healthy complexion," "the iron muscles," "knotted sinews," "vast chests," "long and sinewy arms," "gigantic frames," and other properties of the same kind, which always announce, in contemporary fiction, the advent of a model Christian hero?

The attempt to discuss which of the two views of the relations of mind and body just sketched out contains the greater amount of truth, would lead far; and there is the less need to enter upon the discussion, as they both appear to be essentially wrong. The relations of mind and body are a question of fact, to be studied, not in the light of any preconceived theory whatever, but, like all other questions of fact, by observation and comparison. Fiction, if it is to be anything more than a plaything, ought to proceed upon such observations, and not upon the assumption of the truth of general propositions, which, in reality, are only vague attempts to embody the small amount of knowledge and the large amount of conjecture and assertion which exists upon the subject. The most curious proof that modern popular writers have begun at the wrong end in their attempts to set forth in their novels the relations between mind and body, is to be found in the fact that they all appear to think that physical strength is a plain and simple matter, and that the proposition that a man is very strong is as simple as the proposition that he is six feet high. In fact,

however, that unscientific experience which every one picks up in the ordinary course of life, proves the difficulty of affixing any definite meaning to the word "strong;" and when the difficulties inherent in it are scrutinized, they will be found to resolve themselves into the further difficulty that, when we use the word "body," we are using a word with the meaning—and, if such an expression is allowable—with the extent—of which we are imperfectly acquainted. It may be well to indicate shortly the character of a few of these difficulties.

The first, and perhaps the most formidable of all, is the difficulty of ascertaining, with any approach to precision, what the substantive is to which the adjective "strong" is applied. The following cases are taken from real life, and show how vague the word is. A. was a person of average size, with immense muscular power. He never had a day's illness till he was twenty-three or twenty-four years of age, and was well-known as the most athletic lad at one of the largest schools in England. He died of a rapid decline at twenty-five. B. was a delicate woman, for many years of her life hardly able to leave the sofa. She had a succession of illnesses of the most wearing kind, but she threw them off against all expectation, and passed all the middle and later period of her life in perfect health and great activity. For some years before her death, she laboured under distressing complaints: but notwithstanding this, she lived to a great age. It is obvious that if A. and B. had each been taken at a given point of time, A. would have been rightly called strong, and B. weak; and it is also clear that ther-

was about B. a durability or toughness which was wanting in A., and that that toughness was manifested, not only by her recovery from her early diseases, but by the length of time during which she bore the disease of which she ultimately died. The interval of health and the length of life show that there was strength somewhere, even whilst the diseases were upon her; but where or in what did that strength reside? It is easy to say that A. had great personal strength, and B. a strong constitution, but the word "constitution" is a mere convenience. It points out a difficulty which it does not solve; for what unit was it which, though damaged, was strongly put together? That is a puzzle which has never been solved, and which has hardly been stated completely. A table would not be called strong if two of its legs were cracked and several of its joints loose, however tough might be its materials, and however good its original workmanship. But if the table showed a power of holding together and recovering itself, notwithstanding every sort of rough usage, it might well be called strong, though it was ultimately broken up; and its strength might not unnaturally be measured by the quantity of ill usage which it survived. It is precisely in this power of self-repair that the difference between a body and a mere machine resides. The difficulty of saying what is meant by physical strength lies in the difficulty of distinguishing between the mechanical, and what, for fault of a better word, must be called the vital powers of the body. Look upon the body as a machine—and the broken arm, the tubercles in the lungs, or the cancer in the liver prevent you

from calling it strong ; but if it goes on acting for years, and wonderfully recovering itself again and again from the catastrophe which these defects tend to produce, there must be a strong something somewhere. What and where is that something ?

The whole subject is one of endless wonder ; it is well deserving of far more notice than it has usually received—if for no other reason, at least for the sake of illustrating the crudity of the common notions about physical strength which popular writers are continually preaching. All that can be done here is to hint at a few of the endless varieties of what is called “ constitution ” which would require examination by any one who really wished to understand the subject. The power of supporting hardship is one obvious form of strength, but this power is by no means universally associated with great muscular force, and not uncommonly co-exists with excessive delicacy of organization. Dr. Kane was a wonderful instance of this. Though a professional sailor, he never went to sea without suffering from sea-sickness, and he suffered under both disease of the heart and chronic rheumatism ; yet he underwent sufferings in the Arctic Seas under which the strongest men, specially trained to endure such hardships, sickened and died. In great catastrophes, such as wrecks, sieges, and the retreats of defeated armies, the finest men do not by any means endure hardship best, and the most delicate women will occasionally go through more than any one else. A vessel was wrecked in winter at the mouth of the Elbe ; the crew had to make their way across the broken masses of ice to the nearest shore, some miles off. Several . . .

exhaustion, and amongst the rest a remarkably strong, fine woman, the wife of a soldier on board; whilst among the survivors was a delicate woman who had during the storm prematurely given birth to a child. The peculiarity of this, however, is that the power of bearing hardship does not always vary inversely with the power of making great muscular effort. As a rule, no doubt, in such a scene the powerful man or woman would have a better chance than the weak one, and this makes the exceptions the more remarkable.

Great power of exertion is another obvious test of strength. But here, again, every sort of variety exists. Great power of exertion is quite consistent with extreme delicacy, and with the presence of, or at least with a predisposition to, organic disease. Napoleon was perhaps capable of undergoing, and did, in fact, undergo, greater fatigues than almost any other man who ever lived; yet his digestion was always delicate and easily deranged, and he died of an hereditary organic disease, at the age of fifty-five. It is also a singular thing that great power of exertion in one direction does not always imply its existence in another. Many men can go through extraordinary muscular labour, and put up with all sorts of exposure and hardship, who are quite unequal to continuous severe exertion of the eyes, the brain, and the nerves; and the converse occasionally holds good as well. Long life and continued good health are also tests of strength; but they are often produced by a balance and proportion between powers which are inconsiderable in themselves. It seems a perversion of terms to speak of a person who keeps on living feebly and

quietly—more like a vegetable than a man—for eighty years, as being stronger than one who dies, worn out at sixty by extreme labour, or even by long-continued and long-resisted disease. An old gentleman who has been rector of a remote country parish for half a century or more, without having ever experienced a day's illness or done a really hard day's work, is surely not a stronger man than Fox, who, though he never had good health, would pass any number of days and nights between Parliament, the race-course, and the gaming-table.

December 10, 1859.

VIII.

DOING GOOD.

FEW of the current phrases of the day are more frequently in the mouths of excellent people than that which stands at the head of this essay. It is not uncommon to hear people ranked as good or bad by reference to it. If a man is described as ill-tempered, narrow-minded, and one-sided, the answer often is that he is most unselfish, that he lives for others, and that he passes his life in "doing good;" and the praise awarded to the energetic and successful prosecution of any of the common pursuits of life is often largely modified by the disparaging comment that the person who is entitled to it lives for himself—is intent on his own advantage, and is indifferent to doing good to his neighbours. The constant use of this phrase is a subject of real regret; for few expressions are used more loosely and thoughtlessly, or work more injustice in that secret court in which every man sits in his own mind as judge of the conduct and characters of his neighbours.

The words "doing good" may be used either in a popular or in an accurate sense. Strictly speaking, to "do good" must mean to act right. Hooker says, "The ways of well-doing are in number even as many as the kinds of voluntary actions;" and, of

course, every one would maintain that a man cannot do better than conform the whole course of his life to the rule of duty, whatever that may be. But the popular and technical sense of the phrase is much narrower. It means the expenditure of time and trouble in the direct relief of specific misfortune, or the direct production of specific benefits to individuals or to classes. In this, which is the common application of the word, people would hardly say that the time passed in conducting a series of scientific experiments, however important, was passed in doing good; but they would say so of an evening employed in giving a gratuitous lecture at Exeter Hall to the Christian Young Men's Association. A medical student would not be described as "doing good" whilst he was walking the hospitals, but if he gratuitously advised a poor sick person he would. The whole apparatus of charitable and philanthropic undertakings, which are so abundant in the present day—missionary societies, bible societies, education societies, lecturing societies, and the thousand other institutions of the same kind which are spread over the face of the world,—are all recognized as organs for doing good; but the ordinary pursuits of life—trades, professions, and occupations of every kind—with one or two exceptions, are not.

This mode of speaking does great injustice in more ways than one. It tends to establish an unfounded distinction, to give to the most important part of society an entirely wrong notion of their position and of their duties, and to invest one particular class with a degree of credit to which, in fact, it has little or no claim. It is the common ground of almost all those

who profess to think upon these subjects, that duty is coextensive with life itself, and that the most rational view which can be taken of human society is that it is a sort of body corporate, made up of different members, each of which has its own special function. Thus, one class of men tills the ground, another combines and distributes its produce; a third makes, and a fourth executes laws; and so it would be possible to go through every class of human society. If all these functions are properly discharged, the whole body corporate is in a healthy condition; and thence it follows that whoever contributes to the full and proper discharge of any one of these functions is contributing to the general good of the whole body; so that a person occupied in them is doing good in the strictest sense of the words.

The proof that any given occupation is one of the functions which are essential to the well-being of the whole, lies in the fact of its existence and general recognition as a lawful calling. People have neither the power nor, in most cases, the right to look further. To do so is to assume the character of a judge of the constitution of the world. If a given occupation is openly and avowedly exercised without reproach, that fact is sufficient warrant to any person to engage in it who considers himself to be called upon to do so, either by circumstances or by personal fitness for its duties; and in so far as he discharges those duties he is, in the strictest and in the only proper sense of the word, doing good—that is, he is forwarding and preserving the happiness of the society of which he is a member. A stockbroker who passes the whole day in buying and selling

shares, or a publican who is constantly occupied in serving his customers, passes his time in doing good just as much as the most zealous clergyman or sister of mercy. To deny this is to say that a commissariat or transport corps has nothing to do with carrying on a war, and that this business is discharged entirely by those who stand in the line of battle or mount the breach. Human society is a vast and intricate machine, composed of innumerable wheels and pulleys. Every one has his special handle to grind at—some with great and obvious effects, others with little or no assignable result; but if the object ultimately produced by the combined efforts of all is in itself a good one, it cannot be denied that whatever is essential to its production is good also.

This doctrine on the subject of doing good is not so much contested as ignored by the common use of the phrase. Few people probably would say that any habitual recognized mode of passing time is neither good nor bad; and to assert that any lawful calling is bad, is a contradiction in terms. The phrase "doing good" is used rather rhetorically than logically. It is employed for the purpose of asserting indirectly that the conscious effort to relieve the sufferings or to increase the comforts of others, not only without any motive for so doing in which personal interest can have a share, but without any direct and commonly recognized personal obligation to do so, is in itself a nobler and more elevating employment than any of the common occupations of life which people are paid for carrying on in money, in rank, in reputation, and in other ways.

The assertion or insinuation of such a view is injurious, and the view itself is false.

The insinuation is injurious principally because it has a strong practical tendency to discredit the common occupations of life, and it does this in two ways. In the first place, it assumes that the motives which urge people to the diligent and successful prosecutions of their various callings are, generally speaking, mean and petty. It insinuates that the mainspring of professional zeal is personal ambition; that commerce and agriculture are mere embodiments of avarice; and that, in a word, selfishness is the vital principle of almost every part of society. If this assumption were true, philanthropy in all its forms would be an absurdity. To "do good" to such a society would be like trying to do good to a corpse. The effort to increase the prosperity and to relieve the sufferings of the miserable part of the world would, upon this supposition, be efforts to enable those who had been providentially weaned from a corrupt and detestable system to be as selfish and grasping as the rest. If common life is so corrupt, surely it is no evil to be cut off by poverty or sickness from its pursuits; yet the philanthropists whose habitual language is based on the hypothesis of the corruption and selfishness of ordinary pursuits, strain every nerve to do away with poverty and sickness.

The theory of the baseness of ordinary pursuits not only involves those who maintain it in this inextricable contradiction, but is false. It is totally untrue that selfishness is the life of anything at all—

least of all is it the life of any lawful pursuit. No one, of course, would contend that lawyers are actuated in their profession only or chiefly by a disinterested zeal for the administration of justice; physicians by a desire to promote health; or merchants by a wish that men should enjoy the produce of foreign countries; but it is perfectly true that in every pursuit there is an *esprit de corps* which has reference to such objects as these, and exercises a marked influence on those who adopt it. And it is also a truth, the importance of which can hardly be over-estimated, that nearly every successful member of any profession whatever owes his success largely to the fact that he has pursued it, not from a slavish hunger after its emoluments, but from a genuine love for it, and satisfaction in discharging its duties efficiently and well. A ploughman, if he is worth his wages, likes to see the furrows run evenly and symmetrically; the mason likes to see his work justified by the plumb-line and spirit-level; and in the higher walks of life, every man who deserves, and almost every man who earns distinction, seeks and finds his reward far more in his work than in his pay.

The second way in which the common language about "doing good" does injustice to ordinary life is that, besides bringing against it the false accusation that it is radically corrupt, it does so on the false ground that pursuits which benefit the person who follows them up are selfish. Independently of the consideration that this, if true, would destroy the beauty of philanthropy itself, it is hardly possible to imagine a view which puts people in a more absurd

position. It is equivalent to the theory that we ought to be too fine to take the wages which our Maker offers us, and that the proper attitude for us to assume is that of persons conferring a favour upon creation at large. It is curious to see the doctrine of works of supererogation reintroduced by this door into a Protestant community, amidst the universal applause of those who are considered the picked representatives of the Protestant belief, and the champions of faith against works.

The falsehood of the opinion that conscious and direct efforts to mitigate suffering and to increase comfort are in themselves more beneficial, either to society at large or to the persons who engage in them, than the prosecution of the common affairs of life, is at least as well marked as the injurious effects of insisting upon it. That such efforts are great benefits to the world there can be no doubt, but they are benefits as medicine is a benefit, and they stand in the same relation to common life as that in which medicine stands to food. No one will deny the importance of doctors and surgeons, but we could dispense with their services much more easily than with those of butchers and bakers. We should not get on nearly so well as we do without schools, and hospitals, and charitable institutions; but if they were all swept away, England would still be, and would probably long remain, a great nation; whereas, if the plough and the loom stood still, if there were no government and no law, it would exist for a short time as a den of robbers, and would soon cease to exist at all.

It is thus evident that philanthropy is not the most

important element of human society; and though it may appear a more plausible, it is not a better-founded assertion, that philanthropic pursuits are more healthy to those who follow them than the common employments of life. The grand objection to them all is that people create them for themselves; so that they have far less power to educate and develop the whole mind than pursuits which have received their shape from the permanent standing necessities of human nature. In any calling of this permanent kind there is, and always must be, endless instruction. It has its traditions, its fixed objects, its abuses, its difficulties; it presents a constant succession of problems, which its members must solve for themselves; it pays little attention to their preconceived ideas, but is constantly moulding and changing them in a thousand ways, so that a long life may be passed in the diligent cultivation of such a pursuit without exhausting the instruction which it is capable of giving. This is far from being the case with the great majority of philanthropic employments. A man who embarks in them is a volunteer, and he generally is obliged to put himself forward as a teacher when he ought to be a learner. He is more exposed than almost any other person to the danger of becoming pedantic and petty, and of trying to realize his own conceptions of what people ought to be and to do, instead of learning how slight and narrow those conceptions are. Benevolence is constantly cultivated by philanthropists at the expense of modesty, truthfulness, and consideration for the rights and feelings of others; for by the very fact that a man devotes himself to conscious

efforts to make people happier and better than they are, he asserts that he knows better than they what are the necessary constituent elements of happiness and goodness. In other words, he sets himself up as their guide and superior. Of course, his claim to do this may be well founded; but the mere fact that it is made does not prove its justice. On the contrary, it often arises from a domineering self-sufficiency of disposition, associated with a taste for interfering in other people's affairs. The habit of not only doing this, but looking upon it as the one course of life which is worthy of admiration—as the one laudable employment which redeems the vulgarity and selfishness of the rest—can hardly be favourable to the mental constitution of those who indulge in it.

The habit of doing acts of kindness, and of transacting the common affairs of life in a kind and generous spirit, cannot be too much practised, but nothing has less in common with this than the habit of regarding oneself as the person officially charged with the improvement of others. There is only a slight connection between the maintenance of this general benevolence and any real individual warmth of feeling. The habit of looking upon our neighbours from a position of conscious and avowed superiority has a direct tendency to make sympathy impossible. A man who thinks that no portion of his time is so well employed as that which is devoted to checking and tutoring unruly wills and affections, is fortunate if he continues to be kind and amiable; and one whose cherished object in life is to realize amongst his poorer neighbours some ideal of his own as to

character and conduct, is still more fortunate if that ideal does not rapidly become narrow and petty. Philanthropic pursuits have many indisputable advantages, but it is doubtful whether they can be truly said to humanize and soften the minds of those who are most addicted to them. It is true that they are often cultivated from motives of humanity, but they have far less tendency than might have been expected to develop the principles from which they spring.

These remarks must not be understood to apply to the case of professions like that of a clergyman or physician, in which direct efforts to benefit others form a conspicuous and important element. They are levelled against a contempt for those pursuits which are not so distinguished. In deciding the great question of the choice of a profession, it is, no doubt, a most weighty consideration that some callings make greater demands upon and afford greater play to the kindly and gentle parts of our nature than others; but whether this is a recommendation or otherwise in any particular case, turns upon the natural character of the person by whom the choice is to be made. A man of stern, cold disposition has no right to place himself in a position in which great demands will be made upon his sympathies; but life is large and various, and he may do service in other quarters, in which his services are quite as important. It is hard on such a man to assert, as the current phraseology about doing good virtually does, that unless he forces his nature and enters upon philanthropic pursuits for which he has neither inclination nor fitness, he is

of necessity leading a selfish, godless, graceless life. It is apparently part of the providential plan of life that men should differ endlessly, and this difference is nowhere more clearly marked than in matters of feeling. It is impossible to say that it is a duty to have warm feelings, though it may be a misfortune not to have them, and there is a large class of persons on whom the attempt to warm up their own feelings to the level which might be considered right by others would have no other effect than that of producing either cruel mortification or a self-righteous hypocrisy of the most odious kind. To this class—and few know how large and important a class it is—popular language does gross injustice. Such men may be good Christians, good citizens, useful members of society in honourable callings; yet because their natural temperament disqualifies them from joining in certain amiable enterprises which are invested with a monopoly of the attribute of doing good, they are stigmatized by implication as selfish, harsh, and indifferent to everything but their personal advancement. Few imputations are so unjust. The injustice, however, is one which does little harm to those who suffer under it, for they are usually a thick-skinned and long-enduring generation, whose comfort is not much affected one way or the other by the opinion of others.

December 17, 1859.

IX.

GENIALITY.

THE word "geniality" has obtained great currency of late years, and the popularity of any word which describes mental peculiarities is always a circumstance worth notice. The word "Genial," in the last century, was saved from the imputation of being pedantic only by its claim to be poetical. When Gray said of the obscure heroes of Stoke church-yard—

"Chill penury repressed their noble rage,
And froze the *genial* current of their souls"—

he was thinking, as he constantly did, rather of the Latin poets than of the English language, and he probably failed altogether to convey any definite notion of his meaning to the vast majority of his readers. In our own times, the use and the meaning of the word have both become popular. One of the commonest of the laudatory phrases which form the stock-in-trade of a certain class of reviewers is—"This is a thoroughly genial book." It is a word which is used when it is desired to praise a man's temper, not so much at the expense of his understanding as at the expense of the carefulness and accuracy of his style. It is not common to speak

of a book as genial which is written in a style thoroughly formed and well considered. All the higher qualities of the mind, in so far as they are expressed in style, are, if not opposed to geniality, at least foreign to it. Clearness, force, logical arrangement, beauty of thought and expression, not only may exist apart from geniality, but generally are apart from it. The writers who have the highest reputation for this quality are usually too well pleased with themselves, and too intent on pleasing their readers, to give themselves the trouble of measuring their thoughts or phrases with any great amount of care. Indeed, they almost always rely for their popularity, especially in the case of a school which is obtaining a noxious degree of influence in the present day, on a studied negligence and licence of expression, which is the most odious of all tricks.

The principal element of geniality is, no doubt, the power of, and taste for, enjoyment. A "genial" writer is almost always a writer who not only enjoys the act of writing—for this is frequently the case with the bitterest cynics—but has an affection for the things about which he writes, and feels all the kindly elements of his nature drawn out by their contemplation. A genial novelist likes his characters, and a genial essayist puts forward pleasant views of men and things. The word is not so frequently applied to the graver and more sustained kinds of composition. People do not talk of genial history, genial science, or genial treatises on morality; and if they do talk sometimes of genial philosophy, it is because philosophy, in these days, is much addicted to preferring the shooting-jacket and slippers of re-

views and magazines to the more carefully-adjusted dress which is appropriate to elaborate books.

Every one who has observed the feelings of his neighbours with care will admit that the power of enjoyment and the taste for enjoying life are not only not universal, but even rather uncommon. Most people begin with a certain friskiness of temper, but even in boys this is an uncertain and intermitting state of mind. The common impression made, perhaps on men in general, but certainly on Englishmen in particular, by the observation in life, is sedate and commonplace. An indefinitely large proportion of the energy which is employed in life is employed upon those great standing occupations by which society is carried on; and, though these occupations are the source of an almost endless variety of satisfactions to the persons who are sedulously engaged in them, those satisfactions are almost always of a quiet sort. They consist far more in the general sense of life, vigour, and interest which is attached by the constitution of our nature to the successful prosecution of any occupation whatever, than in that dwelling on, and revelling in, something pleasant which is implied by the word enjoyment. Dryden's celebrated lines briefly and happily contrast the two tempers :—

“Glory is an empty bubble,
Warfare is but toil and trouble,
Never ending, still beginning,
Fighting still, and still destroying.
If the world is worth thy winning,
Think, oh ! think it worth enjoying.
Lovely Thais sits beside thee,
Take the goods the gods provide thee.”

Whatever Timotheus might say or sing, the greatest part of the happiness of the world lies in the toil and trouble never ending, still beginning, with which he contrasts in so emphatic a manner the temper which contentedly dwells upon and enjoys the goods the gods provide. This enjoying temper is precisely that which constitutes what is known as geniality. Horace's picture of the man who "indulges his genius" is made up of plenty of logs on the hearth, and a day passed in drinking, whilst Soracte is white with snow; and the popular notions of Christmas run parallel to this.

The greatly increased importance attached of late years to this temper of mind is significant; and it is still more significant that almost all popular writers seem to feel that to be without it is not only a defect on their part, but something like a sin which they make the most frantic efforts to avoid. The factitious geniality with which they succeed in providing themselves consists of two main branches, one of which owes its origin principally to quasi-artistic, and the other to quasi-theological considerations. The former class of writers constitute what may be called the neo-Cockney school. Their theory of literature, like that of their predecessors of thirty years ago, is that the rules and principles which were formerly supposed to be authoritative on the subject are exploded, and that the true method of writing is for the author to put himself at once upon terms of the most unrestricted familiarity with his readers, to take every sort of liberty with them, to joke and gambol before them on every occasion, and to be

constantly clapping them on the back, and calling them "old fellow." This art has occasionally been cultivated by men of really great powers, of whom Professor Wilson was perhaps the most remarkable. The broad Scotch, the whisky, the sporting, and all the other drapery of the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, were only modes of perpetually pressing on the attention of the readers of *Blackwood's Magazine* the reflection that its principal contributors were jolly fellows, who enjoyed life to the utmost. A little of this is all very well; but it is curious to observe how soon we get more than enough of it. When the whole series of the *Noctes* came to be published, the most ardent Scotchman must have felt that the four or five volumes acted upon the intellectual appetite much as the six Solan geese acted upon the physical appetite of the man in the old story, who ate them as a whet. With the swarm of small writers who have not a spark of Professor Wilson's powers, the effort to be genial is from first to last simply disgusting. One of these gentlemen, for example, wished to give the public an account of a railway accident at which he was present. The genial mode of doing so required that he should begin with an account of his breakfast, and hints about his landlady. So he began somewhat in this style:—"Breakfast. Hot coffee and buttered rolls. Splendid coffee—how I admire you, Mrs. Jones! The juiciest of mutton-chops. I could kiss you, Mrs. Jones!" and so on through any number of little jerking collections of words, which had as much claim to be considered sentences as a polypus has to be treated as a vertebrate animal. This style

of writing is only a way of saying "See what a pleasant, lively fellow I am! What a fund of enjoyment and animal spirits I possess! See how I overflow with playfulness and frolic, and admire and love me accordingly."

The other class of genial works consist principally of novels written by men who consider themselves bound to protest against ascetic views of religious belief in favour of that kind of theology which pervades Mr. Kingsley's publications. This way of writing is less objectionable than the Cockney style, for those who adopt it are generally men of more thought, education, and refinement, than the gentlemen who view literature as an arena, which they are to enter head over heels, shouting, "Here we are again;" but they agree with them in the determination to put a cheerful enjoying colour upon life by some means or other. The device to which they most commonly resort is the introduction into their books of a superabundance of amusements and adventures, and the endowment of their heroes with every conceivable attribute of physical perfection. The athletic and courageous clergymen, the sturdy infidels who are converted to a manly Christianity, and marry lovely schoolmistresses in consequence, the accounts of hunting, fishing, shooting, and boating which fill so large a portion of their books, are introduced for the sake of the inference that righteous, God-fearing men (the word "religious" has a bad reputation with writers of this school) enjoy the world in which they live, and the existence to which their Maker has introduced them.

To many—it is to be hoped to most readers—the writers of the one school are simply disgusting, whilst the confident bearing of the other is not free from a strong tinge of swagger and a strong suspicion of hollowness. Enjoyment forms a small and unimportant element in the life of most men. The material of which life is made may be, and probably in most cases is, satisfactory, for there can be no doubt that if life not only was an evil, but was felt and perceived to be such, the population would be speedily thinned by suicide or by vice. People would not bring into the world and rear up families of children, if they did not on the whole find life a pleasant thing. It does not, however, follow that because they find it pleasant they enjoy it. With the majority of men, enjoyment is casual and transitory. It fills up only their lighter moments, and has not much to do with their deepest feelings and most permanent concerns. To this majority, therefore, geniality is frequently unwelcome; at least, it is welcome only because it takes them out of themselves, and leads them into a train of thought and feeling foreign to that in which the greater part of their lives is passed. For a man who has no wish to protest against this habitual level of feeling, who recognizes it as the temper of mind in which life ought to be passed, geniality has comparatively few charms. It is at best an amusement, sometimes elegant, often disgusting. If it is habitually indulged and artificially forced to pervade all the relations of life, it becomes as nauseous as sweetmeats mixed with meat and bread and cheese. To such persons no comment

seems so appropriate to much of the popular literature of the day as the saying of Solomon—"I said of laughter, It is mad; and of mirth, What doeth it?"

December 24, 1859.

X.

LORD MACAULAY.

ON Monday next Westminster Abbey will receive the body of one of the very small number of our contemporaries who have had a real claim to be laid there. There may possibly be amongst us men of greater learning than Lord Macaulay, though they must be very few. We may even have writers whose technical literary skill is superior to his. We have certainly deeper thinkers, but no other living English writer has shown in so many ways the general power and fire which pervaded his whole nature. There are amongst us, no doubt, miracles of versatility. We have statesmen who pique themselves on literary ability, and men of letters who speak with considerable confidence on politics; but there is a wide difference between the cleverness which does well a number of things which have no solid connection with each other, and the force which displays itself with equal vigour in kindred, though separate pursuits. The one proves nothing more than the pliability and dexterity of the mind which possesses it, and it is not unfrequently associated with a levity or insincerity of character which may excite our astonishment without gaining our respect; but

the other is among the strongest proofs which can possibly be given of true depth and genuine power, not merely of understanding, but of character. The real foundation on which Lord Macaulay's greatness rested was the substantial unity of his whole life. The principles of his literary and of his political career were identical. He was not one of those who pass from letters to politics in order to provide new stimulants for a vanity satiated by old ones, but he made the two halves of his life play into each other. After advocating in Parliament, with extraordinary power and success, the principles to which he was attached, he proceeded to advocate them with even greater and more permanent effect as a political historian. No other politician, and no other author, has ever set in so strong a light the great truth that the business of life is the best apprenticeship to literature, and that the higher departments of literature derive the same advantage from a practical acquaintance with the business of life which the blood derives from passing through the lungs. Whatever may be the faults or defects of Lord Macaulay's books, it is impossible to read them without feeling that, though the author had more rhetoric and more imagination in his composition than almost any one of his contemporaries, he was neither a poet nor a rhetorician, but a sober and experienced statesman. He was the master of his fancy, and not its servant; and if any one compares his life and writings with those of M. de Lamartine and M. Michelet, he will see how strong a contrast there is between a statesman who is also a man of genius, and a man of genius who supposes that, as such, he is a statesman.

Deep and valuable as was the influence which Lord Macaulay's legal and political training exercised over the mind, it can be considered, upon a review of his whole career, only as an apprenticeship to those literary labours which were the real work of his life. It was through them that he exercised the widest influence over his contemporaries, and it is by them that he will be remembered hereafter. The same unity which belonged to his life characterizes the whole of his writings. All of them are essentially historical and political. One or two of his essays are purely literary; but most of them relate either to politics or to political biography, and his poems, without an exception, are of the same cast. It is, therefore, in his conception of history and politics, and in his manner of dealing with them, that the leading habits of his mind are to be traced. One of the most characteristic was his constant and instinctive association of politics with history. He was not only a Whig, but he was the greatest, and indeed almost the only great, advocate and expounder of Whig principles since the time of Burke. These principles are essentially historical. They rest, not upon any theory as to the rights of man, nor as to the pleasures and pains of which men are susceptible, but on a series of facts and precedents relating to the rights of Englishmen. Persons are not wanting who condemn them as narrow and shallow, but it is an unquestionable truth that their assertion has been closely allied, not only with a course of national greatness and prosperity unequalled in human history, but also with a spirit of reverence and affection for the past which in other countries has hardly ever

been separated from a love for despotism and bigotry. It would be impossible on the present occasion to discuss the limitations and additions which Whig principles require in order to be accepted as true. No doubt they are important, and in so far as he failed to recognise them, Lord Macaulay's political theories were false or defective; but no reasonable man can doubt that their prevalence and assertion have been of inestimable value to the nation, and it is no small service to have grasped them with the firmness and to have expressed them with the symmetry and power which mark every portion of Lord Macaulay's writings. Many readers may feel that in his reviews of Mr. Gladstone's *Essay on Church and State* and Southey's *Colloquies on Society*, and in his Essay on the admission of Jews to Parliament, Lord Macaulay not only left untouched many questions of vast importance, but failed to show that he appreciated their weight. Yet it is still to be said that the theory which he did advance is a weighty and perfect one, that he threw it into the clearest shape possible, and that in so doing he rendered a service of vast importance to all persons who think upon the subject—and especially to those who agree with him least, inasmuch as the systematic vigour of his expressions must force his opponents, if they have any power of mind at all, into an attempt to invest their objections to them with something like equal clearness.

The greater part of Lord Macaulay's opinions on politics are characteristically embodied in his narratives, and can hardly be separated from them; and though his polemical writings are admirably vigorous and precise, he undoubtedly showed far more of his

real nature in describing men and relating facts. His mode of doing so was not entirely free from objection. His colours were generally too glaring, and his habit of resting satisfied with exclaiming against the inconsistencies which he detected in the conduct of remarkable persons, without attempting to discover the principles by which they might be harmonized and reconciled, was unfortunate, and sometimes unjust. Marlborough cannot have been a moral monster, nor does it follow that James was a living contradiction, because he risked his soul for the sake of his mistress, whilst he was risking his crown for the sake of his creed. But notwithstanding the blemishes of the most popular history that ever was written, its popularity ought not to occasion regret or wonder; no one can see that massive fragment—glowing with enthusiastic ardour, and testifying in its very defects to the rush and riot of genius by which it was moulded—without feeling that the strong man who bowed himself before his work was done would, if he had been spared to complete it, have left behind him, not indeed the greatest of histories, but a book which would have done more than almost any other to delight his countrymen, and to teach them to love as he did the land over which he rejoiced and exulted with an admiration as passionate as it was manly. Now that that eloquent tongue and more eloquent pen are silent for ever, it is to these characteristics that the mind most willingly reverts. Whatever else he was, Lord Macaulay was a true Englishman. A more hearty lover of his country never lived. With occasional asperity, with some injustice, with a good deal of language which it is hard to justify, and with some estimates of indi-

vidual character with which it is difficult to sympathize, the keynote both of the History and of the Essays is as generous and as magnanimous as was ever struck. The first lines of his ballad on the Spanish Armada might well form the motto of his greater works—

“Attend all ye who love to hear our noble England’s praise;
I sing of the thrice famous deeds she wrought in ancient days.”

There are probably no finer compositions of their kind in the language than the Essays on Lord Clive and Warren Hastings. The founders of our Indian Empire stand out before us as they fought and conquered, with the radiance of victory and patriotism shining through the blemishes and crimes by which they were stained. They live and move without grimace or exaggeration, not claiming to be heroes whom we are to worship, nor incarnate ideas which we are to analyze, but English gentlemen whom, for the good service which they did to their country, we can love, and honour, and forgive.

In these days, when young people are sedulously provided, through the medium of little pictures of little domestic incidents, and little caricatures of little follies, with a store of little scruples and theories about the world in which they live, and with a *hortus siccus* of emotions and tempers from which they may learn how they will or ought to feel in every possible circumstance of life, Lord Macaulay’s Essays have an incidental value which is almost boundless. There is hardly any other book relating to modern times, which will at once tempt a boy to read and teach him to think. They contain a wider range of sound knowledge, and exemplify more fully the qualities

of power, precision, and definite statement, than any other book which a boy is likely to read; and they have, moreover, the merit of dealing with great subjects in a fearless way, and sweeping aside with a rough hand the cobwebs which so often entangle and fascinate the young by their promise of mystery and profundity. Their faults are hardly likely to injure a mind of any depth; for there is nothing which such minds (especially in youth) resist more vehemently than a theory which is certainly clear and possibly shallow. The Essay on Bacon, to which great and just objection has been taken, is quite as likely to lead an inquisitive lad to try to find out for himself what Bacon was as to induce him to congratulate himself on knowing all that is to be known on the subject. Indeed, if he is in danger of the latter result, Lord Macaulay is hardly likely to do more than give an intelligible form to errors which would otherwise have assumed a confused one.

Of all Lord Macaulay's works, his poems are, in one respect, the most curious. Their composition was, perhaps, one of the most remarkable feats of strength upon record. They have effectually popularized one of the leading theories of Niebuhr's history, and they have done so with such force and simplicity that the theory is made familiar to thousands of readers who are ignorant, not only of German, but of Latin. To have combined the production of such a result with the composition of almost the only really spirited ballads written in the present generation would have been enough to secure a considerable literary reputation. Campbell immortalized himself by two songs, Gray by thirty or

forty stanzas ; and we may form some notion of Lord Macaulay's claims upon fame by the thought that, of the thousands to whom his name is familiar, comparatively few associate him with the Prophecy of Capys, the Battle of the Lake Regillus, or the Ballad on the Spanish Armada.

To those who were honoured with Lord Macaulay's personal friendship, his works will always have an interest which, with all their popularity, they can hardly excite in most of his readers. Few men have impressed their personal character more deeply on what they wrote. It has been insinuated that Lord Macaulay had little sympathy with those amongst whom his early life was passed, and that the opinions and professions of his manhood were discordant with the lessons of his youth. It would be impertinent to enter largely upon this question, but it may be stated with great confidence that the society in which his childhood was passed, and from which his earliest impressions were received, was not the dull, bigoted, narrow-minded circle which some assertions respecting it and him would imply that it was. Lord Macaulay was not the only remarkable man in the present generation who was brought up in his infancy at Clapham. When the " Clapham Sect " is referred to, it should be remembered that one of the ablest speakers* and one of the best political economists† of the last generation were amongst the half dozen persons upon whom Sydney Smith bestowed the nickname. Lord Macaulay's father was something better than a man of genius, for he sacrificed not only his time and his labour, but his fortune,

* Mr. Wilberforce.

† Mr. Thornton.

and, as far as calumny could destroy it, his reputation, to labours of love, in which he bore the burden whilst others reaped the glory. When it is implied that it is an extraordinary thing that men of ability should be born and bred in such a society, it should be remembered that the same society produced many other men who were highly distinguished in their day. It would be easy, but it would also be inappropriate, to name them here. Any one who understands the temper of Lord Macaulay's early associations may easily trace the influence upon his mind of his father's friends. His works do not contain—and it is, to some extent, part of their plan to exclude—express statements of theological belief. Nor is this surprising when we remember that one modern doctrine of the political school to which he belonged, and of the theological party amongst whom he was brought up, was the separation of politics and theology; but on the other hand he invariably handles religious subjects not only with reverence, but with tenderness. One of the graces of style for which his essays are conspicuous is the beauty and reverence with which he introduces Biblical expressions when the opportunity for doing so arises. It was not from Mr. Carlyle that Lord Macaulay learned to admire Cromwell; and it ought to be remembered that in some of his earliest writings—writings in which his youthful impressions can be traced most forcibly—he manfully contended for the greatness of the Puritans.

To those who knew Lord Macaulay personally, a studied vindication of his affection for the memory of the friends of his youth would read like an insult. The quality by which he was most pre-eminently dis-

tinguished was the intensity of his domestic affections. A warmer-hearted man, or one more disposed to cherish hereditary friendship, to acknowledge and to repay obligations, to show kindness, to do favours, to help the distressed, never lived in the world. This, however, is ground on which it would be wrong to linger here. It is enough to bear witness to the regret which must be felt when so eminent a name is struck off from that list of great men which increases so slowly and diminishes so fast.

January 7, 1860.

XI.

LIMITATIONS OF MORALITY.

It is obvious that controversies of the most fundamental character upon many of the subjects of thought which permanently interest mankind are rapidly approaching. The questions, for example, which are suggested by the consideration of the chief political topics of the day involve principles which are imperfectly understood, and which have not as yet been even stated with any approach to fulness. Such phrases as "progress" and "civilization," which pass so glibly over our lips, have a very vague meaning. We are not only ignorant of the course which we are steering, or which it would be desirable for us to steer, but we have not distinctly made up our minds that we are to steer, and not to drift wherever the waves may carry us. This makes all our domestic politics indefinite and unsatisfactory. In foreign politics, questions arise of hardly less importance, involving principles of which we know, and affect to know, very little. Are we to take a side at all in the domestic affairs of foreign countries, and, if so, to what extent? Are we to remain absolutely neutral unless our own immediate safety is involved, and if so, on what principle? Perhaps the most

embarrassing questions of this order which recent events have brought to light are those which relate to the government of India. We, who at home are the upholders of something approaching to political Quakerism, and who affected to condemn as an atrocious crime the attempts of Russia to extend its limits or its power by aggressive warfare, are regarded throughout the whole of the East as the greatest conquerors that the world ever saw; and notwithstanding all that is to be said on the subject, it would be vain to deny that, in our inmost hearts, we cherish the recollection of the wonderful achievements which have won for us the Indian Empire with feelings of pride and satisfaction which are not consistent with the estimate we usually express of the conduct of many of our neighbours. It is needless to advert expressly to the religious questions raised by our position in India, as they will naturally suggest themselves to every reader.

All such problems, infinite as their variety may be, will be found to depend in a great measure upon some of the oldest of the great standing controversies which have exercised the intellect of mankind ever since it first woke to consciousness of its powers. An age almost entirely absorbed in the pursuit of mechanical results may deride them as merely boyish speculations, but they are in reality matters, not only of vital, but of immediate practical importance. They are such as these,—What is the ideal of human life? What do we really wish to do and to be? Are we in earnest when we say, as we sometimes do, that a life spent in the discharge of Christian duties is the highest form of life, and, if so, how do we extract

the Indian Empire from Christianity? What place do the duties and aspirations of a citizen and a patriot find in our ideal, and upon what warrant are they to be included in it? Questions so vast and intricate cannot be handled here with any approach to fulness, but it is possible to make one or two suggestions as to the mode in which they ought to be viewed and discussed.

The most important of these suggestions is that the mere morality of actions is not the only standard to which they may be referred. The highest, or nearly the highest, point which morality can reach is innocence. Like all other laws, the moral law is almost always negative, and its commandments almost universally run in the form of prohibition—"Thou shalt not kill," "Thou shalt not steal." Socrates' demon always forbade, but never exhorted. When morality goes further than this, it introduces us to an order of things which lies beyond and beneath it. Thus it is a great general principle that love is the fulfilling of the law; but if love involves, as it unquestionably does, a wish for the welfare of that which is the object of love, it pre-supposes a knowledge of the elements on which the welfare of that object depends, or at least an opinion on the subject. And this brings in a whole class of considerations which are entirely foreign to mere morality; for "welfare" is a large word, and includes the perfection of every part of that to which it is applied, and thus it implies a knowledge of the constituent elements and ultimate destiny of human nature itself. It follows that moral considerations alone will not enable us to solve practical moral problems, because

there is an enormous class of subjects of the highest importance which are not described either in an exhaustive or even in a satisfactory manner by the words "right" and "wrong." It would, for example, be a strange abuse of terms to say that art, that literature, that national greatness, that the general vigour with which men seek the common objects of human desire—a condition which varies immensely in different nations, and has more to do with national prosperity than almost any other—are in themselves either right or wrong. A man naturally feeble, lethargic, and irresolute may be either worse, or better than, or as good as, a person of the opposite temperament. Morality may be compared to the dams and floodgates which regulate the flow of the stream of life; but the quality and volume of the stream itself are independent of them, and morality was neither intended to furnish—nor can it possibly furnish—any test as to its character. To attempt to derive from morality an answer to questions which lie beyond its province is one of the commonest of the proofs of the all but universal ignorance which exists amongst us as to its limits.

These considerations assume in practice the most definite concrete forms. What are we to think, and how are we to act, in relation to national enterprises like the establishment and maintenance of our Indian Empire? Is our position there radically right or wrong? The answer depends entirely on our conception of national existence, and on the degree of importance which attaches to the different objects which nations propose to themselves. The question as to what it is right or wrong for a nation to do

depends upon the further question as to what a nation is, and for what purposes it exists. And this is a matter of which we know exceedingly little, and on which our present habits of thought do not encourage speculation. A single illustration will perhaps throw some light upon the depth of the ignorance in which we are involved upon it. One of the principal subjects which excite the attention and draw forth the enthusiasm of almost every modern observer of national affairs, is the diminution of crime. Tacitly or expressly, it is constantly assumed that there is no better test of the goodness of a nation; and that to produce a state of things in which no overt acts of wickedness should take place would be the highest aim which philanthropy could propose to itself. It is certainly true that every crime which is committed diminishes all that every good man would wish to increase, and produces a train of consequences which, as far as we can trace them, are simply detestable. Good does not come from evil, and evil can never be the subject of any other feeling than anger and sorrow; but there is another truth which lies beyond this. It is that, though there is no assignable connection between crimes—still less between vices—and goodness in general, or any good thing in particular, the most innocent men and nations are not the greatest, and therefore not the best or most admirable. A baby who dies at a month old, an absolute idiot, a man who has been shielded by circumstances from all knowledge of either good or evil, are not the types to which one would wish to see mankind at large conformed. It is said that the Icelanders never commit

crimes, and that the same is true to a great extent of the Esquimaux; but even if this is the case no one would really wish to see England and France converted into a larger Iceland and a larger Greenland. It would seem to follow from this, that greatness and crime are each in some way traceable to causes which lie deeper than the distinction between right and wrong, and that there must be something more valuable than blamelessness—something higher than innocence. We call that something by a variety of names of which “progress” and “civilization” are perhaps the most in vogue, but it is remarkable that we never apply to individuals the rule which we all apply to nations. We are all willing to put up with the extreme wickedness of a few as a sort of concomitant of the greatness of the nation to which they belong, but no one would expressly advise an individual to do wrong acts for his own advancement. If it were put to the vote, no one would sacrifice the history of this country for the sake of a history of unbroken inoffensiveness, varied by no incident and exalted by no greatness. Yet no one would say that a man ought to tell a lie or commit a murder for the sake of any conceivable advantages to himself or to his friends.

It is entirely impossible to solve such questions as these—at least in the present state of our knowledge. Yet it is wise to weigh them, to turn them over in the mind, and to attempt to realize the fact of their existence, and obtain some conception of their relations to the great interests of life. As a matter of fact, they usually solve themselves in practice. There are acts of which the justice and the virtue


cannot be disproved, which no one ever ventures to propose to a nation. An unexpressed conviction pervades mankind that the ordinary rules of morality do not quite reach the case of national acts; and it is by no means true that this conviction is altogether wicked or altogether unfounded, though it may be made the excuse for detestable wickedness. In the same way, there are persons who have been guilty of great crimes whom nevertheless the common verdict of mankind does not utterly condemn. The man after God's own heart was a murderer and an adulterer; but those two words would not be an adequate description of David. Like all other things, morality has its limits. They are dim and mysterious in the highest degree—but they exist, and their existence should be admitted.

January 28, 1860.

XII.

CHRISTIAN OPTIMISM.


It is not easy to find a perfectly common-place man or book. Even in these days, in which the decay of individual types of character is engaging the attention of some of our most remarkable writers, people are almost always distinguished, if by nothing better, at least by crotchets, from their fellow-creatures. To have reproduced, without any variation whatever, the very commonest of all types—to have adopted, with absolute satisfaction, the exact set of phrases which ninety-nine people out of every hundred are repeating all day long—is, as times go, not an inconsiderable feat. It has been achieved with rare success by a man who is, in other ways, entitled to be considered as in some degree deserving of notice; and the result is, for several reasons, worthy of attention. Mr. W. E. Baxter, the member for Montrose, has attracted some attention in Parliament, and has made one or two speeches which have afforded some indications of future distinction; but, amongst other things, he has taken a fancy to publish an “unpretending work,” consisting of notes of ten lectures delivered at various religious and literary societies, and composed “during the leisure hours of two winters.” They “do not



pretend to be exhaustive ;” and as they consist, to a great extent, of quotations from familiar books, they do not “lay any claim to great originality.” They are not the less worthy of attention, inasmuch as they exactly reach the level to which a large proportion of English written words—for they cannot be called thoughts—rise in the present day. If a man could be conceived to have no other intellectual nourishment whatever than the sentiments usually professed at Young Men’s Associations—and if he were so constituted that he should not only have no mental digestion at all, but should not even feel the necessity or comfort of keeping the contradictory parts of his miscellaneous remarks at such a distance from each other, that one might begin to be forgotten before the other was brought forward—he would write just such a little book as Mr. Baxter’s *Hints to Thinkers*. The first sentence of the book is as good a specimen of it as any other. “It is curious to observe how many sages and moralists—to say nothing of literary men” (who, of course, are never sages nor moralists) “and poets—have in all ages of the world’s history mourned over the degeneracy of the times in which they lived. Greek and Roman writers have handed down to us eloquent descriptions of the cloudless skies, the sea,” &c. &c., of past times. Wonderful, however, as it may appear, this is not the case—the former times were not better than these. Next comes superstition, which is a very bad thing; and, though it flourishes greatly in our days, as spirit-rapping and table-turning testify, “it is hardly necessary to state that ignorance is its mother.” The pleasures of literature, political liberty, an over-

aling Providence, mental improvement, priestcraft, national armaments, narrow-mindedness, and religious persecution, are each handled successively in the same style; and when the end of the book is reached, the reader has a perfect specimen of the apologies for opinions upon these immense subjects which people in these days accept, as a mere matter of course, without examination or inquiry. That Mr. Baxter's views were taken up in this way is evident from the manner in which they are expressed. From one end of the book to the other there is not a vestige of an attempt at thought. Everything which has a reasonable title to be considered common-place is put down, although the very next page may contradict it. We are told, for example, that superstition is "gradually disappearing before the advance of intelligence," and in the next page that it abounds in England and America, amongst "well-informed and enlightened men and women." So we are informed that, "as a general rule, persecution is an inefficacious means of putting down opinion." Two pages before it is stated that in France, Spain, Bohemia, Moravia, and Austria, the persecution of opinions puts them down effectually. A saving clause is added—to avoid the trouble of thought—that "these cases may perhaps be regarded as exceptional" When there is a common-place each way, it is a good plan to state both, and affirm of the less popular of the two that it constitutes an exception to the other.

If it be asked why so much notice should be given to a volume which certainly makes as few pretensions as it sustains, the answer is, that hardly any other




represents so completely a considerable and important body of opinion. It explains, all the more clearly because it is illogical and purely instinctive, the state of mind of a man who is passive in the hands of the age in which he lives, and receives its stamp without a struggle or a murmur. The book is pervaded by an infantine satisfaction with things as they are going to be. We live in a world just imperfect enough to be interesting. Once there were superstitions, and some of them still remain, but they are fading away before the advance of intelligence. Once there was much of religious bigotry and persecution, and there is still a good deal of both in a small way, but ("though it may be necessary to put in a caveat against latitudinarian indifference") the advance of intelligence will put an end to both. Confidence in the advance of intelligence, with an indistinct belief in an over-ruling Providence, and a general impression that the human race is always to go on making a series of safe investments for both worlds, make up the general mental furniture of the greater part of mankind.

The place which religious belief occupies in minds which are in this frame is one of the most curious of common phenomena. Habitually, and without any apparent consciousness of difficulty or contradiction, they persuade themselves that the gist of Christianity is that it gives a supernatural warrant and extension to the unquestioning optimism with which they regard the present state of things. Progress and civilization carry them by easy and agreeable stages to the grave, and they seem to assimilate just as much theology as is capable of carrying them a step further

in the same direction. Their advice to mankind is—Behave well, in order that your friends and yourselves may be comfortable, and may be provided here, and probably hereafter, with rational amusement and healthy occupation. All things which either do, or once did, seriously disturb the normal comfort and repose of mankind are either extravagancies or superstitions, which you will rather avoid and explain away than condemn; but be careful, above all things, to maintain and propagate a certain easy-going level of quiet satisfaction—moral, physical, and mental. Never make the effort of thinking out any subject whatever. Repeat the obvious and usual observations about it; and if any difficulty presents itself put it out of the way with some such phrases as—"Here we must be on our guard against an undue adherence to the principle which has been stated." "There are, of course, exceptions to this." "We must carefully guard against exaggeration," &c. &c.

Some such meaning as this lies at the bottom of almost all that ordinary people understand by such words as "Christian civilization." It would be strange that any one should really take such a view of life if we did not know that all language acquires with wonderful rapidity a set of conventional meanings, which vary to any required extent from its original signification. A man who seriously maintains that the New Testament is an optimist book, and that its characteristic feature is faith in human progress, is beyond the reach of argument; and though, of course, any one is at full liberty to throw its teaching aside, or to deny its authority, it is



singular that men like Mr. Baxter should show, in all they write, that they consider their views as Christian in the highest degree, and upon the most improved principles. Imagine such a sentence as the following put before the writer of the Apocalypse:—“The same law of progressive improvement is in operation with respect to the mental, material, moral, and religious condition of mankind. Advancement is surely the universal rule.” This may be quite true, but what is to be said about the second death and the lake burning for ever with fire and brimstone, which were such conspicuous features in St. John’s view of the law of progressive improvement? So long as the Christian creed includes belief in a Day of Judgment, with the sheep on the right hand and the goats on the left, the wheat gathered into the barn and the tares cast into the fire, we may make as many comfortable theories as we please about the world, but we had better not say too much about their Christianity.

This is not the place for theological controversy, but if we view such speculations as Mr. Baxter’s on narrower and more familiar grounds, it is impossible not to feel a degree of dissatisfaction with them which amounts to something not unlike indignation. Could any one really be satisfied with the attainment and diffusion of any conceivable amount of comfort? Or do the whole series of influences which the popular sentiment almost deifies really affect deeply the standing calamities and complaints of life? It is easy to bring the question to a fair test. If all the causes which we see at work around us were to continue to operate for an indefinite length of time in the utmost

vigour, they would probably not raise the average standard of comfort for the whole population above the point at which the average of the better-paid professional classes stands at present. The wildest dreams of the most sanguine believer in progress on Christian principles would be more than realized if he ever saw ordinary day-labourers as well off and as intelligent as ordinary lawyers, doctors, and merchants are at present. Take, then, one reasonably prosperous person of this kind, and see whether he is in an entirely satisfactory condition. It is clear that he is not. He neither knows whence he comes nor whither he is going, nor for what purpose he lives; at least his knowledge upon these subjects is so indefinite, so much involved in metaphors and mysteries, that it is little more than enough to make visible the darkness in which he stands. He passes his life in a round of occupations which often fatigue and hardly ever satisfy his mind; and the very comforts which have been provided for him by an indefinite multiplicity of social devices, as often as not operate to choke and strangle his energies. It is needless to detail the features of a familiar picture. Every one ought to know the gloomy side of life, and though it is not the whole truth, it is right that its existence should be recognized. It is an insulting affectation to keep it out of sight, and to persist in crying up progress and improvement as if there was no undying worm and unquenchable fire.

The condition of our life is that we stand on a narrow strip of the shore, waiting till the tide, which has washed away hundreds of millions of our fellows, shall wash away us also into a country of which there

are no charts, and from which there is no return. What little we have reason to believe about that unseen world is that it exists, that it contains extremes of good and evil, awful and mysterious beyond human conception, and that those tremendous possibilities are connected with our conduct here. It is surely wiser and more manly to walk silently by the shore of that silent sea than to boast with puerile exultation over the little sand-castles which we have employed our short leisure in building up. Life can never be matter of exultation, nor can the progress of arts and sciences ever fill the heart of a man who has a heart to be filled. In their relation to what is to be hereafter, all human occupations are no doubt awful and sacred, for they are the work which is here given us to do—our portion in the days of our vanity. But their intrinsic value is like that of schoolboys' lessons. They are worth just nothing at all, except as a discipline and a task. It is right that man should rejoice in his own works, but it is wrong to allow them for an instant to obscure that eternity from which they derive their only importance. Steam-engines and cotton-mills have their greatness, but life and death are greater and older. Men lived, and died, and sorrowed, and rejoiced before these things were known, and could do so again if they were forgotten. Why mankind was created at all, why we still continue to exist, what has become of that vast multitude which has passed, with more or less sin and misery, through this mysterious earth, and what will become of those vaster multitudes which are treading, and will tread the same wonderful path?—these are the great in-

soluble problems which ought to be seldom mentioned, but never forgotten. Strange as it may appear to popular lecturers, they do make it seem rather unimportant whether, on an average, there is or is not a little more or less good nature, a little more or less comfort, and a little more or less knowledge in the world. Men live and die in India, and China, and Africa, as well as in England and France ; and where there are life and death there are the essentials of existence, and the eternal problems which they involve.

February 11, 1860.

XIII.

FANATICISM.

WHENEVER the history of this age comes to be written, many subjects will require separate and special description which it will be impossible to connect with that continuous narrative of political and military events which must always form the backbone of history. Of these subjects, the great change in the general feeling of mankind as to religious belief which has marked the whole course of the nineteenth century will be one of the most remarkable. For many years past, and especially during the last generation, theology has been regarded with a degree of attention and respect which it had not previously commanded. The subject has been almost universally approached and handled with much reverence, and with the most earnest attention and interest, and the controversies connected with it have steadily increased in weight and depth till they have attained to greater importance than has marked any controversies since the Reformation. Considering the importance which must always attach to this, the greatest of all subjects of human contemplation, hardly anything can be more interesting, even to

those who stand outside the pale of theological controversy, in the proper sense of the words, than to attempt to understand the growth of the different phases of the popular feeling respecting it. To such persons the rapid growth of religious feeling manifested by such facts as the Irish revivals and the systematic prayer-meetings which are at present common in this country must be most interesting. Some of these things are no doubt subjects of congratulation and satisfaction. Even if such results are looked at exclusively with reference to their effects on the general level of human happiness and virtue in this present life, it must always be a great gain that people should take an interest (however awkwardly they may show it) in each other's welfare here and hereafter—that they should rise, by means however strange, out of the common occupations of life into a region of feeling and of thought conversant with objects more ennobling and enduring than that of satisfying the various propensities of mind and body. It is, however, right to bear in mind the truth that effects like these are not the only ones which are produced by the religious movements of the day. Now, as in former times, the wheat and tares grow up together. *Apparent diræ facies*. It would seem as if it were a necessary part of human nature that every constitution should have its characteristic diseases, and that we should renew our acquaintance, not only with the zeal and fervour, but with the superstition and fanaticism of eras memorable in the history of the world.

No one can look thoughtfully at the different manifestations of religious zeal which abound at

present without feeling compelled to ask himself singular questions. To anyone who respects either order, decency, or good manners, they are, in many points of view, most repulsive. To attribute the growth of religious feeling to a divine afflatus, and in the same breath to get up an organized agitation for producing the symptoms which are supposed to denote its operation, is a proceeding open to the imputation of extreme irreverence. The sight of large crowds suddenly collected, for no apparent reason, to hear special services in unaccustomed places, when not more value than usual appears to be set upon the ordinary ministrations of religion, suggests such words as extravagance and fanaticism. But words and feelings, though they may be guides to arguments, are no arguments in themselves; and the chief value of such observations to thoughtful observers is that they force upon them the question whether, after all, religion is a good thing, and if so, whether it is good under all circumstances and in all times and places. For it is quite certain that, whilst an indiscriminate advocacy of the proceedings referred to places those who conduct it in opposition to the plainest dictates of common sense, an indiscriminate and absolute condemnation of them, not merely in their practical development but in their very principle, involves consequences which few persons who retain the name of Christians would like to acknowledge.

This being so, what is the principle on which opinions ought to be formed on such subjects? What do we really mean to acknowledge as substantially good, notwithstanding the grotesque or even hurtful

forms which it may assume, and what are we prepared to condemn as being bad in itself, however closely it may be connected with names and habits usually recognized as sacred ?

All such inquiries consist almost exclusively of attempts to describe classes of phenomena which have, as it were, been labelled with certain eulogistic or dyslogistic epithets. Most people would say that "religion" is a good thing, and "fanaticism" a bad one; and no doubt these words are applied respectively to laudatory and condemnatory purposes, but they throw no light upon the question whether there is any principle by which it may be determined whether a given description of conduct ought to be described by the one name or the other. Probably the question could not be answered with anything like an approach to completeness without reference to many such principles. One or two which tend to clear it up may be indicated here.

The most general notion which we can form of religion, as the word is used in the present day (for its older meaning of ceremonial observance is merged in a far wider one) is that it describes the frame of mind of a man who habitually views this life in reference to the unseen and eternal world, and who regulates his conduct accordingly. This is, perhaps, a somewhat wider signification than popular usage would affix to the word, because it takes in all forms of belief respecting the unseen world, and not merely those which the person using it recognizes as true. It would, for example, unquestionably include the belief of a sincere Mahometan, for there can be no doubt that to such a person the world which lies

beyond the reach of sense, as he conceives it, is at least no less near and real—often nearer and more real—than to ordinary Christians. It would also include a man who, like the devils, believes and trembles.

It is important to affix some reasonably definite sense to the word "religion," because it is generally used so vaguely that it is almost impossible to investigate the real meaning of propositions into which it is introduced. It is frequently employed as if it embraced all that is good, and was opposed to all that is bad; and when this is done, it looks like impiety to suggest that religion has any limits at all, or that any of its genuine manifestations can be accompanied by any inconveniences, or can, under any circumstances, be regarded with suspicion or regret. This view of the subject, however, is at once inaccurate and fatal to all calm and honest consideration of it. Religion, like other words, has its appropriate meaning, and is capable of being contemplated apart from, and independently of, other things, both good and bad. It is but one of a great number of influences which affect the mind. It is, for example, distinct from affection for individuals, from prudence, from benevolence, from fortitude, from truthfulness, and even from the theological virtues, such as faith, hope, and charity. A man may be keenly alive to the existence of an unseen world surrounding him on all sides of his existence, past, present, and future, and acting upon him in every possible way, and yet he may or may not have all, or any, of the several qualities enumerated. It is, moreover, almost impossible to say what will be

the effects of superinducing such a consciousness upon the pre-existing elements of the character of any given person. It may be affirmed with confidence that the effect will not be indifferent, and that in all ordinary cases it will be good; but there are also cases in which it will be either positively bad, or at least extremely dangerous, and though such instances form a minority, they are numerous enough to require special and attentive consideration.

There is room for endless discussion as to the objects for which people live; but one observation may be made on the subject which few persons would deny in theory, and hardly any one in practice. This is, that in order to obtain any object at all, a certain degree of community of sentiment and sympathy with the rest of the world is absolutely indispensable. Indeed, their entire absence almost constitutes madness, whilst their presence implies that, up to a certain point, the person who possesses them shares in the unexpressed convictions which almost entirely regulate the conduct of the great mass of mankind. Every one likes comfort, prosperity, the good opinion of his neighbours, health, success in life, and a variety of other things, of the same sort, and every one dislikes the opposites of these; and this state of things is indispensable to the existence of human society. It exists in sincerely religious people—using the word in the limited sense ascribed to it above—as well as in others, though there is no doubt that religion not only may, but often does modify it deeply, and though it is equally certain that it may be set in such a light as entirely to

destroy it. The religion which destroys this balance may properly be called fanaticism, though it is admitted to be sincere and is not proved to be false. Indeed the very same creed may deserve the title of religion in one man, and that of fanaticism in another; for in the tougher mind it may not produce the consequences which would turn those who hold it into fanatics. No honest observer will deny that there is a great deal to be said in favour of what are called gloomy religious opinions. There is, no doubt, evidence on which any one who is disposed to do so may believe that his existence is an intolerable evil to himself and to the world at large; and many of those who lament his conclusion would find it impossible to overturn it upon the premisses common to them both. It may appear strange and paradoxical, but unquestionably, in many minds, this conviction coexists with the balance just mentioned. It is certainly not impossible, it is probably not uncommon, for a man to say—"I think life is on the whole a misfortune, but as I find myself here I will make the best of it;" and it may be that the cases in which such persons actually succeed in leading useful, honourable, and, on the whole, happy lives, are less rare than would be supposed. Indeed it might be plausibly contended that some such sentiment colours far more deeply than would at first sight be imagined, the whole of English life, and the life of all the most energetic nations in the world. This, however (which may be described as a compromise with despair), is not a condition to which every one can attain. Sensitive and irritable minds are sometimes entirely absorbed and destroyed by such feel-

ings—Cowper affords a melancholy instance. No one can deny that his religion was genuine and sincere, and it is equally indisputable that his sincere and genuine religion drove him mad; nor is it possible to escape the conclusion that if he had had less of it, if the eternal world had beset him less constantly and less closely, he would have been a happier and, as far as human judgment can go, a better man.

Of course it is said, that this despairing or half-despairing condition of mind is only a step in a process, and that it is frequently the passage to a settled and happy condition, resting on assurances which must not be discussed here. This may be true, but it is not a universal truth. The stage in question is one beyond which many travellers never proceed at all, but in which they continue more or less consciously during the whole of their lives. To such persons the mere consciousness of another world and the pressure which it exercises, which is what is here meant by the word religion, is by no means an unmixed good. It operates on them in a thousand ways, according to the diversities of their natural character, but it almost always disturbs, to some extent, that moral balance and composure without which life can hardly be carried on at all. Under the influence of such feelings, a harsh and severe man becomes more harsh; a person of easy temper becomes dissatisfied and unsteady; a turbulent and daring man becomes dangerous, and a timid one superstitious.

This, of course, is not the common effect of such movements as we see around us. Human nature, as

a rule, and especially English nature, adopts convenient compromises with almost miraculous facility; and people whose religious feelings are for a time stirred up by revivals or special services are for the most part affected much like the sleepers in the Enchanted Ground, whom Christian and Hopeful tried to wake. They talk a little in their sleep, and then turn round again. In other words, they are benefited to some very small extent indeed by what is, to other persons, either a savour of life unto life, or a savour of death unto death. It would be out of place here to insist upon the first half of this alternative: but it seems important, for many reasons, to direct attention to the second. It is true that fanatics will always form an inconsiderable minority in every nation, and especially in our own; but minorities, numerically inconsiderable, do a vast proportion of the mischief which is done in the world, and when a given temper is not only mischievous, but picturesque, its danger to society is at a maximum. This is precisely the characteristic of fanaticism. The magnitude of the influences on which it depends and from which it arises redeems it from vulgarity. A man really anxious about heaven and hell, death and judgment, may be grotesque, absurd, mad, and irreverent to any conceivable extent; but till cunning and hypocrisy come in—which they soon do—he is not a proper subject for contempt or ridicule. He is, however, one of the most dangerous of all members of society; for the whole temper of his mind tends to destroy and to abjure that balance and compromise on which every existing institution is of necessity based. In this age and country, which possesses

unequalled dexterity in the art of devising clever little applications of great forces, fanaticism would tend not to produce tumults or civil wars, but to dwarf to its own low and partial level every institution framed upon wider and calmer principles than it can understand. For this reason it would be especially dangerous to the Established Church, which, with a composure and completeness constituting its great titles to the affection and respect of all reasonable minds, represents the impossibility of giving full play to any one of those multifarious elements which collectively make up the creed and the practice of every considerable body of men. If people, stimulated by one overwhelming feeling, should ever succeed in narrowing its pale or in diminishing the independence of its ministers, they would strike a heavier blow than has ever yet been struck at the freedom and depth of character which always have been, and always ought to be, characteristic of this country.

These remarks on the characteristics of fanaticism are not intended to throw any light whatever on the duties of preachers. A man may well believe that it is his duty to stir up his hearers to a consciousness of that which lies around and before them, whatever consequences he may produce, because, upon the whole, the good which he does greatly preponderates over the harm. Their object is rather to explain the reason why those who are not under this obligation cannot regard even the most sincere and judicious efforts to produce—not a general improvement of the whole complex nature of man—but a violent specific action of one of its


functions, with altogether unmixed satisfaction ; whilst they look with disapprobation and alarm on efforts, not directed either by sincerity or discretion, to inflame passions which are equally capable of being the greatest of blessings or the greatest of curses to the human race.

February 18, 1861.

XIV.

THE END OF THE WORLD.

THE doctrines of popular theology are, for the most part, closely connected with the permanent wants and inclinations of human nature. People bring to the Bible a great part of what they find in it; and it is usually safe to infer, from the fact that vast consequences are drawn from a few scattered and mysterious indications, the conclusion that there is something in mankind which suggests those consequences independently of revelation. This is well illustrated by the common opinion on the end of the world. The belief that all human affairs will, at some time or other, be terminated by one tremendous dramatic catastrophe—that the whole history of the human race leads up to that result, and that the epoch at which it will take place is capable of being foretold—commends itself so powerfully to the imagination of mankind, and is met with under so many different forms in various countries and at various epochs of human history, that it is well worth while to consider what are the natural foundations on which it rests. Its theological evidence or bearings cannot be noticed here.



It might, at first sight, have been supposed that the most obvious view of human affairs is that which regards them merely in detail, and with a view to the present, or, at most, to the immediate future. A man would seem to occupy a position at once intelligible, and not easily assailable who believed that there was no evidence at all on which he could found any opinion as to the origin of the human race, if it ever had one, or as to its ultimate destiny, if any such destiny is ever to overtake it. It would seem, if we speculated *à priori* upon the beliefs which would find favour with the common run of men, that it would be natural for people to limit their speculations to the prospects of their own generation, and at farthest to that of their immediate descendants, and to leave the world at large and the human race in general to take care of itself. This, however, has not been the case in point of fact. Whatever may be the cause, in times and countries where there has been any intellectual activity at all, men have shown a disposition to attribute to the history of the human race a dramatic unity. Traces of this tendency are to be found in the classical visions of ages of gold, silver, brass, and iron—in the Hindoo cycles and avatars—in the ancient Rabbinical traditions to which a certain number of idle pretenders to learning still profess to attach importance in our own days—and in the eagerness with which the Christian world has in all ages deduced from the Bible, not merely the general doctrine (which is not discussed here) that the present dispensation will conclude at a given time, and in a visible and, so to speak, dramatic manner, but the specific opinion that that final consummation was at hand on

many different occasions. Every one knows that certain classes of society in the present day receive the expressions of this opinion not only with favour, but with a sort of avidity; and most of us are probably aware that at particular periods—as, for example, at the beginning of the eleventh century—the conviction that the end of the world was actually approaching prevailed widely enough to produce serious effects upon the current business of society. Some of the arguments produced in favour of specific predictions upon the subject are so feeble that they can hardly weigh with any one qualified to appreciate the answers to them, though they are at times urged with a dishonesty which requires exposure; but the sentiment which gives these arguments their real weight is a more important matter, and deserves more sympathetic examination than it usually receives.

It will perhaps be most easily investigated by asking the inverse question, Why should the human race not come to an end? And to this the answer is, that such an anticipation contradicts that general assumption of permanence and stability which underlies all our speculations upon every subject whatever. Given human nature as it is, and given the conditions of life, it seems to follow that birth and death will go on indefinitely, and that men will continue to people the earth just as the earth will continue to revolve in its place in the solar system. The only possible answer to this is that it is very possible to ascribe too much importance to the conditions upon which the permanence and stability of our mental operations depend. It does not follow that a proposition must

be true, because without it our speculations would fall to the ground. The real inference is, that the value of our speculations depends upon the degree of truth contained in the fundamental assumptions on which they repose. The tendency of men to believe that the world will come to an end, and to dally with and in some degree to welcome the anticipation, is only one form of their impatience of the conditions under which they think and live, an impatience neither ignoble nor altogether unreasonable. Rude ages and populations are oppressed by the routine of daily life, and in more cultivated times a somewhat similar result is produced by the wide diffusion of scientific methods of thought and observation. The thought presses on the mind that the thing that hath been the same also shall be—that the world and all that is in it, and all the other worlds by which it is surrounded, are a huge dead machine, grinding on eternally according to its own principles, and coming back perpetually at regular intervals to the same result. In the presence of these great regularities, the little irregularities of individual will and character seem to disappear, and man sinks into the condition of a wheel in the vast and fatal machine which inexorably hems him in on every side. Such thoughts do not of course present themselves to a rude age in this precise form. In such an age, the absence of uniformity or plan in nature weighs upon the soul as its omnipresence does in our own times. Men find their purposes thwarted and themselves controlled by a vast irrational brute nature, which condemns them to an endless unintelligent slavery. In either case, the conception of the end of the world is welcome. It is an opportunity

for the spiritual nature of man to defy its material antagonist. It is an elevating thought that at some time, and under some circumstances, all that we see, and touch, and weigh, and measure, will cease to be, and that the spirits of men will be recognized, for good or for evil, as the real substances of which the heavens and the earth are the accidents. Whether such an anticipation is true or false, it is at least splendid; and it gives the lie to much of that sham magnificence with which, in a scientific age, things intrinsically dead and soulless are invested by false associations.

Every generation is guided, and to a great extent governed, by ideal conceptions; and the conceptions which influence any given age are indicated by the abstract words which find most favour with it. There is little difficulty in specifying those which act most powerfully on our own times. "Progress" and "civilization" are the most important of them, and they point to a view of life which to many minds is utterly intolerable. They imply some such dream as this—The time will come, and is now coming, when war shall be unknown, when crime shall cease, when comfort shall be universal, and when life, almost freed from disease, shall be prolonged some years beyond its present limit. Every year will bring forth inventions which will economise labour. Principles universally accepted will give an ease, a gentleness, and a regularity to life which exists at present only amongst the affluent and privileged classes. Every one will be as well off as the comfortable part of the English middle classes are at present, and the characters of men will be cast in

a mould as easy and inoffensive as their circumstances. Such is the sort of ideal which in a thousand ways is hinted at. Seventy, or say even eighty, years of harmless comfort, and then a quiet death.

The world in which we live is a moral problem already, and one which is at times distressing, but such a lubberland as that could be made tolerable only by the prospect of its speedy end. That men really passed through six thousand years of trial and suffering, in order that there might be at last a perpetual succession of comfortable shopkeepers, is a supposition so revolting to the moral sense that it would be difficult to reconcile it with any belief at all in a Divine Providence. The expectation that the world—that is, that human society—will some day come to an end, is based upon the belief that man is something more than the complement to brute matter, that he imparts dignity and interest to the planet in which he lives, and does not receive his importance from it. It follows, from such a belief, that the narrow and limited range of human faculties, the ceaseless strife and bottomless confusion of human passions, the struggle between moral good and evil—each of which, as far as human eyes can see, is not only antagonistic but necessary to the other—are not mere processes tending to work out their own solution here in some future generation, but tremendous mysteries which can never be reconciled until some final decision and judgment is pronounced upon them.

It is impossible to say what analogy exists between the race and the individual, and attempts to explain the history of the one by the stages which mark the

life of the other are at best more ingenious than satisfactory; but almost every fact with which we are acquainted seems to suggest that some such analogy exists, though its particulars are altogether unknown, and though we cannot even say whether mankind ought to be compared to one individual or to many. It may, however, be allowable, in dealing with a subject which appeals rather to the feelings and to the imagination than to the reason, to point out the fact that the cessation of human society would present a striking analogy to the death of individuals, and that there would be the same contradictory mixture of completeness and incompleteness about a society eternally renewed as there would be about a human being who never died. The conviction that the life of a man forms a moral whole is so thoroughly worked into our minds and our very language that no one doubts it. That it is a mysterious and utterly contradictory thing at its best estate is the experience of every person who has even ordinary powers of reflection. It is hard to imagine the degree in which these mysteries and contradictions would be heightened if man were immortal. If, after arriving at that average degree of prudence and self-restraint which almost every one attains comparatively early in life, people lived on and on for centuries and millenniums, carrying on the same transactions, settling the same difficulties, enjoying the same pleasures, and suffering from the same vexations, the question why they ever were sent into the world at all (which is even now sufficiently perplexing) would become altogether overwhelming; and the faith which people at present maintain in the Divine government of the

world would have to be based on entirely different grounds, if it survived at all. It is, perhaps, not merely fanciful to suggest that a somewhat similar difficulty would exist if human society, after a long and laborious education, were to attain to a stationary state, and were then to go on indefinitely enjoying itself. Such a heaven on earth would at best be high life below stairs.


The celebration of the triumphs of civilization, which is at present in full bloom, produces on many minds an effect not unlike that which Robespierre's feasts to the Supreme Being produced on his colleagues. "You are beginning to be a bore with your nineteenth century," is the salutation which many a philosopher would receive in these days from a sincere audience. Weigh, and measure, and classify as we will, we are but poor creatures, when all is said and done. It would be a relief to think that a day was coming when the world, whether more comfortable or not, would at least see and know itself as it is, and when the real gist and bearing of all the work, good and evil, that is done under the sun, should at last be made plain. Till then, knowledge, science, and power are, after all, little more than shadows in a troubled dream—a dream which will soon pass away from each of us, if it does not pass away at once from all.

April 14, 1860.

XV.

PAIN.

ONE of the most characteristic features of this age is the popular view of the infliction or permission of physical pain. That it should be regarded with universal dread and dislike is of course natural; but for many years past people have gone far beyond this. That anybody should be in pain, and not be immediately relieved—that sharp pain should ever be inflicted on any one under any circumstances—that physical discomfort, in the shape of bad health, or habits tending to produce it, or in almost any other shape, should ever be allowed to exist undisturbed—shocks and scandalizes people in these days, and makes them exclaim against the contrast which such facts are said to bring to light between our professed Christianity and our real indifference to suffering. For many reasons, this state of mind is worth notice, especially because it is, comparatively speaking, new. Men have always shrunk from suffering, and possibly the inclination to do so is not stronger now than it has been at former periods; but the universal sensibility to it and intolerance of it which shows itself in all quarters in these days is comparatively modern. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries people were not less reli-



gious than they are at present, but they were not the least scandalized by scenes which in the present day would be intolerable. Flogging, branding, and other corporal punishments of the most severe kind—the pillory, for example—were exceedingly common, whilst an unhealthy prison excited no remark at all. “The Puritans,” to quote one of Lord Macanlay’s most pungent antitheses, “objected to bull-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bull, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators;” and several of them coupled a protest against the infliction of capital punishment for theft with a protest against the infliction of secondary punishment for manslaughter. The Mosaic law, they said, prescribed restitution in the one case and death in the other, and that was enough.

The grounds and the reasonableness of our present feelings on the subject afford a curious subject for inquiry. It should be observed, in the first place, that the object of our dislike and disapprobation is narrower than might have been supposed. There are many kinds of suffering to the infliction or permission of which no greater repugnance is felt at present than in former times. It is principally to acute pain and to physical pain that the objection is felt. If it is either mental or chronic, it troubles our humanity comparatively little. This is well illustrated by the tone which every one thinks it necessary to assume in writing or speaking of torture. The word itself is a reproach; and to assert that it is inflicted or permitted in any case whatever is to bring against those whose conduct is so described a heavy charge. However right this feeling may be, it is not

reasonable, for there is no doubt whatever that practices equivalent to torture are constantly carried on without exciting scandal. In France, the abolition of judicial torture was looked upon as one of the greatest and most unquestionable benefits of the Revolution, yet a proceeding essentially identical with it is in full practice without any sort of remonstrance at the present day. In the last century, when a man was strongly suspected of crime, wedges could, under certain circumstances, be driven between his legs and a case in which they were enclosed, until he confessed his guilt. This is no longer lawful, yet it not only is lawful, but is the ordinary course of criminal justice, to keep a suspected man without a trial in solitary confinement for the express purpose of getting evidence from him by reiterated interrogation as to the crime of which he is accused. It is obvious that many cases might arise in which a few turns of the thumbscrew or a certain number of wedges in the boot might be a far less evil than prolonged solitary confinement; yet a polished and susceptible nation, which was horrified at the one infliction, is indifferent to the other. Something of the same kind may be observed in our own country. A military flogging is not nearly so severe a punishment as penal servitude, and desertion is as great a crime as ordinary thefts; yet when a soldier is flogged for the former offence, far more attention is attracted and far more sympathy elicited than when a labourer is sentenced to penal servitude for the other. A parallel might be found in the case of exhibitions. A prize-fight is denounced as brutalizing and disgusting because two men severely beat and bruise each other in public, and because

there is a good deal of blood to be seen ; but if a man walks a thousand miles in a thousand hours, though he strains his bodily powers much more severely, and risks far more serious and permanent injury than the prize-fighter, the exhibition may be described as foolish, but is never stigmatized as brutal.

From these illustrations, which might be indefinitely multiplied, it appears to follow that the form of humanity which is so characteristic of the present day is averse not so much to all suffering as to suffering in its acute and picturesque form. We shrink not from the notion that a fellow creature is unhappy, but from the idea of cutting, tearing, or bruising flesh and limbs like our own. Tenderness for the sufferings of our own imaginations is constantly confounded with, and is probably at all times an element in, the disapproval which is excited in us by hearing of the infliction of pain on others. It is hard to say how far this feeling accounts for the language which is in common use amongst us in reference to such matters. That it has much more to do with it than people in general are willing to suppose, seems to follow from the fact that arguments are hardly ever brought forward upon the subject. People rely entirely upon two or three standard phrases to express their abhorrence of the permission or the infliction of acute bodily suffering. When, for example, we read of cruelties practised, or said to be practised, by despotic Governments, the "instincts of humanity" are appealed to. General Haynau, it was said, flogged women. The instincts of humanity, it was supposed—and to judge by the result it was rightly supposed—were revolted by the mere mention of such

an act. No one asked what the woman who was flogged had done. The act in itself was considered as condemned by its own atrocity. If any one asked the question why women should not be flogged if they deserved it (a question to which there are, especially in our own time and country, a variety of sufficiently satisfactory answers), he was always met by an appeal to instinct. It never occurred to those who gave the answer that even in this country such an instinct is of modern growth, and that a hundred years ago the flogging of women was quite compatible with the instincts of Englishmen, and was not unfrequently practised. The instinct, therefore, is not an ultimate fact—an unchanging and perpetual element of human nature—but only the particular sentiment of the present generation; and thus the degree to which it ought to be allowed to prevail and extend is still a question for discussion. Another expression of the same kind, which comes a little nearer to being a reason, is found in the word “brutalizing.” A prize-fight, it is said, is a “brutalizing” exhibition. Flogging is a “brutalizing” punishment. It is no doubt true that to inflict pain on a man is to appeal to his animal nature in a direct and emphatic manner, and this may be done in a way and to a degree which will either ignore or supersede his spiritual nature; and it is also true that to come to look upon the suffering of another merely as a source of excitement, would be to reach a degraded condition. But neither of these is the necessary consequence of the use of sharp physical pain for particular purposes. They rather result from the mode and degree of its application.

When the subject is approached with calmness and

impartiality, it will probably be found that there are principles upon which the permission and infliction of the most severe sorts of physical pain may be regulated, and that our present habits of thought and feeling have gone a good deal too far in the direction of prohibiting its use in all cases whatever. The objections to pain as a punishment, or to exhibitions which involve pain, are no doubt substantial. No punishment varies so much in amount, none affords such scope for tyranny, for bad temper, or for malignity and cruelty. It is moreover irremissible when once inflicted; and it is usually too short to admit of much permanent influence being brought to bear on the person who suffers it. All this, and much more, is sufficiently familiar to persons who care to understand the principles of punishment. The other side of the question is not so familiar, and the fact that it has fallen out of sight is, on many accounts, to be regretted.

In the first place, it deserves a certain degree of notice that, according to the constitution of nature, pain may be expected to have its place. It is the great natural check by which men are governed; and it exercises, perhaps, a stronger moral influence than any other power in the world. No one can have witnessed the moral results of severe pain consequent upon illness or accident without seeing that no known power is so searching and so extensive in its range. The lessons which are taught by discomfort and suffering are wonderfully valuable. There is no other school in which things are set in their true light and rated at their true value so completely. In some respects, physical is even more instructive than

mental pain. In every form of mental suffering, the operations of the mind are themselves the source of the pain felt, and thus, while it lasts, the mind does not reflect upon or confront it; but bodily pain, being external to the mind, by confronting and assaulting it, teaches it lessons which have more chance of being remembered than almost any others. It seems foolish to throw away this great resource in punishing those who are the proper objects of punishment merely because it pains those who inflict it as well as those on whom it is inflicted, especially when we remember that, as a form of punishment, it has many recommendations, such as brevity, emphasis, and great convenience and cheapness. The real reason which indisposes people to the infliction of pain is the suffering which the spectacle produces on society at large. This, however, so far from being a valid objection, is to some extent a positive advantage. It is right and desirable that people should see themselves and the world in which they live as they really are. It is not to be wished that whatever is wrong and bad should be penned off from the rest of the community in a moral cesspool. It is, on the contrary, a good thing that people should see the results of the bad influences which their conduct engenders, and should undergo the pain of witnessing or hearing of the infliction of the necessary penalties. A somewhat more precise acquaintance than is commonly possessed with some of the secrets of prisons and hospitals would make many of us sadder, and most of us wiser.

With regard to exhibitions which involve physical pain, a distinction may be suggested which it is well

to bear in mind, though its application in practice may be difficult. There can be no doubt at all, on the one hand, that to learn to bear pain patiently, and to acquire a certain degree of indifference to it, is a most valuable accomplishment; and much of the admitted importance of athletic sports is derived from the fact that they have a considerable influence in this direction. To bear with good temper the kicks incidental to football, the bruises of a boxing-match, or the fatigue, distress, and sore feet which result from long walks and climbing over mountains, is a substantial advantage; but it is possible to carry such practices to a point at which they become evils, because they invest the power of enduring pain with more importance than it deserves. Pain is not the evil of evils, and ought not to be recognized as such. If it is, the higher forms of courage are lost. This is well illustrated by the discipline of the Spartans and by the voluntary tortures of the North American Indians. The Athenians were an overmatch for the former, and Europeans for the latter, though an Indian will undergo, merely for the credit of the thing, tortures the description of which it is sickening to read, and which no white man could endure at all. Courage is not the mere absence of fear, but is an active principle, and can be fostered only by a generosity and liberality of treatment incompatible with a training by which too much importance is attached to mere physical suffering.

May 5, 1860.

XVI.

CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA.

OF the various subjects which occupy the attention of the religious and charitable societies which, in the eyes of a large and influential class, form the chief attraction of the month of May, none possesses so much interest for the world at large as the prospects of Christianity in India, and the nature of our national duties in respect of those prospects. It is much to be regretted that a subject which involves such momentous interests should be habitually agitated in an atmosphere too close for free discussion and too fervid for calm reflection. The question involves Imperial interests so vital that almost all others are insignificant in comparison with them. Of all the opportunities that ever fell in the way of a nation, that which has now fallen to us in respect of India is perhaps the most marvellous. Over upwards of 150,000,000 people we have absolute control. They, their property, and their institutions are for the moment at our mercy. There is no Power, native or European, to interfere between them and us; and we are called upon to consider what are the principles upon which our conduct towards them is to be regulated, and what are the

ends towards which our efforts are to be directed. It is deeply to be regretted that these momentous points should be handled chiefly by clergymen in a state of conventional excitement, or by Indian officers who, though frequently in the highest degree gallant and meritorious, have been immersed in the practical details of public life from a very early age, and have ever since been so completely cut off from the intellectual atmosphere of European society that they have not that instinctive appreciation of the tremendous difficulties lying at the root of the whole subject which educated English laymen almost invariably possess. The clergy—and especially the members of the most active of our Church parties—are of course the official representatives of theology; and a soldier who has passed his life in war and diplomacy amongst the semi-barbarous natives and Governments on the Indian frontier is not to be blamed if, on returning to England, he supposes that, if he wishes to further the interests of religion, he can hardly go wrong when he puts himself in their hands. It requires the experience of English life to know the depths of ignorance and presumption, especially in all that relates to their own profession, which is the characteristic peculiarity of popular preachers and platform divines. A man who comes to the subject from pursuits of a totally different nature is not in a position to appreciate the monstrous absurdity involved in the assumption that the principles upon which the most important affairs of the nation should be regulated are to be gathered from the lessons of such a class. It would be impossible, within reasonable limits, to discuss, with any approach to completeness, the immense question of

Christianity in India; but it may be possible to suggest one or two considerations which will show the sort of problems which it involves, and give a faint notion of the tremendous danger to which our Empire may be exposed if popular agitation is allowed to determine the principles on which such a subject ought to be treated.

The most prominent and definite proposal which has been made on the part of those who think that our Government ought to be conducted, as they say, "on Christian principles," relates to public education. They propose that in all schools supported by Government the Bible should be introduced. Some persons seem to propose that the Bible should be placed in the schools merely as a sort of symbol, as the Royal Arms are placed in Courts of Law in this country. Others wish that instruction in the Bible should form part of the instruction in the schools, compulsory upon all scholars who might attend. It can hardly be disputed by any one who has the least acquaintance with education that the practical importance of such steps would be imperceptible. To make children read the Bible for an hour in the morning, whilst the day continued to be passed in heathenism, would have about as much tendency to make them Christians as a rule that the children in our own National Schools should read the Koran for an hour every morning would have to make them Mahometans. The real value of either measure, and the true ground upon which it is recommended, is that it would involve the assertion of a principle on the part of the Government; and as the influence of all Governments in the East is enormously great, it is

supposed that the bare assertion of a principle would have considerable practical results, whilst at all events it is contended that it would set the country, in its corporate capacity, in a proper attitude with respect to its Maker.

The principle which the Government is wished to lay down by this means is, that Christianity is true, and that the authorized version of the Bible stands in the same relation to it as the Koran to Mahometanism—that is, that it is an ultimate and infallible authority on all the subjects to which it refers. This is the interpretation which the natives of India are intended to put on the introduction of the Bible into the schools supported by Government, and there can be no doubt that this is the interpretation which they actually would put upon it. It is important to observe what this proposal involves. It proceeds upon the ground that it is not enough for the English in India to be Christians individually—to profess their religion in the most open way by public worship, by endowing ministers of religion, and by endeavouring in their private and individual capacity to convert the natives to their own faith—but that, in addition to this, the Government ought in its public and corporate capacity to undertake some of the functions of a missionary, by publicly proclaiming, by significant acts, that Christianity is true, and that a translation of the Bible, authorized by itself, is a perfect and infallible exposition of it. This proposal certainly has the merit of being intelligible and important; but it is open to objections so weighty that, independently of its direct results, its adoption would be an immense calamity.

In the first place, if the experience and the controversies of the present generation have proved anything at all, they have shown that it is no part of the province of Governments to lay down the truth of any theological propositions whatever. Not very long ago, few speculative subjects attracted more attention than the nature of the relations between Church and State. If these controversies are now appeased, that circumstance is certainly not owing to the fact that theological speculation excites less interest than it formerly did. On the contrary, it was never more active. It is to be considered rather as the result of a practical solution of the particular question brought to light by the course of events. After a controversy which began with Catholic Emancipation and the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, and which displayed its last relics of vitality in the debates on the admission of Jews to Parliament, it has been practically decided that there is a very large province of human affairs, involving moral responsibilities of the highest possible importance, in which people can co-operate with the greatest mutual advantage without any common profession whatever of theological belief, and in spite of theological differences of the most extreme kind.

Whilst this process has been going on in one department of life, no corresponding results have been reached in the other. That men of very different creeds can, in their political capacity, dispense with any common confession of faith, has been abundantly proved; but the difference between the creeds themselves, if it has changed at all, has become wider and more strongly marked than it used to be. Indeed,

the growth of theological differences has not been confined to different sects, but has penetrated their boundaries and extended widely amongst the individuals of whom they are composed. There is probably no religious denomination in the present day, the theological teachers of which could modify its established doctrines with any chance of commanding the assent of the individual members. Formularies already in possession stand by their own weight; but he would be a rash man indeed who attempted to change any of them.

In such a state of things it would be immeasurably undesirable that the State should commit itself to theological propositions, the extent of which would be equalled only by their vagueness. To attempt to profess a religion without professing a creed is as absurdity. If the English Government in India were to inform the people of India that Christianity was true, without informing them whether it meant Roman Catholic Christianity, Church of England Christianity, Greek Christianity, Baptist Christianity, or Unitarian Christianity, it would publish nothing more nor less than an unmeaning platitude. To do justice to those who are most earnest upon the subject, their proposal is not so vague as this. It has the merit of being definite enough, for it consists in proposing that the Government should hold out to the natives of India the authorized version of the Bible as an ultimate, infallible, and sufficient exposition of their own views. The proposal is monstrous. In the first place, this is not the doctrine of any Christian Church whatever. It would be impossible to extract it from the Thirty-nine Articles, and it is diametrically opposed both to

the principles and to the practice of the Roman Catholics, who form a large proportion of our population. Why is the Government of India to take upon itself to assert to its subjects that the Song of Solomon and the Book of Esther are ultimate, absolute, and infallible truth, and that the Books of Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, and the Maccabees, are entitled to no authority at all? However true the proposition may be, it is one of which the Government of India officially knows nothing.

If there is any religious body with which the English Government can be said to be connected, it is the Church of England. But the Church of England has cautiously abstained from any detailed categorical statements as to the attributes of the Bible, or as to the assistance necessary to understand it. To put forward the Bible by itself in the manner proposed, would be to give an official declaration as to its authority far more emphatic than any theological declaration which the Church of England has ever made on the subject; and such a course would, at the same time, pass over a variety of collateral considerations which it is impossible to neglect with any regard either for honesty or for safety.

When an Englishman reads the Bible, he reads it by the light of a thousand associations and traditional modes of thought and feeling. He and his countrymen have professed the Christian faith for many centuries, in one shape or another. His language, his moral sentiments, even his intellectual habits, have been deeply influenced by Christianity. He is, moreover, an Englishman, and as such has been accustomed to regard other things, which have reached

him through other than Christian sources, as equally entitled to respect. However much, for example, he may believe in the divine authority of the Sermon on the Mount, he would shoot dead an invader or a robber with as little hesitation as a mad dog. He would think it excessively absurd to scruple to take oaths in a court of law. However strong his belief may be in the book of Genesis, he is quite as firmly convinced of the truth of physical science; and though he may believe in the most literal manner that the Israelites were commanded to exterminate the Canaanites, he would never make a precedent of their conduct, nor would he consider that the bitter imprecations which fill the 109th Psalm would justify him in praying that unrighteous men might be judges over his enemies, and that their seed might beg their bread in desolate places. In other words, he reads his Bible by the light of experience, science, and morality; and though he may not form any definite theory upon the subject of the relations of these authorities amongst each other, the practical result is utterly different from that to which he would be brought if, being a mere heathen immersed in slavery and barbarism, he were officially told that the whole of the Bible was an absolutely true exposition of the Christian religion, and that every part of it was of equal authority.

It is notorious that people will find in the Bible, as in other books, very much what they seek in it; and if the children of the authors of the massacres of Delhi and Cawnpore were really to study it, they would probably dwell far more on the stories of the hewing of Agag in pieces, the extermination of the

Amalekites, and the execution of the descendants of "Saul and his bloody house," than on the Ten Commandments, the Gospels, and the Epistles. There is one modern example of the use made of the Bible by persons who had none of its spirit, and to whom it was communicated upon the same sort of terms as those on which it is proposed to cause the Government to put it before the people of India. That example is an instructive one—it is the case of the Taeping rebels, who, by cruelty and blasphemy, have done much to disgust the Chinese with the very name of Christianity.

The single consideration that the relations between the Bible and science are far from being definitely settled is a reason sufficient to call upon the Government to abstain from the course proposed to them. Governments can act upon broad, patent, notorious facts only. They cannot treat anything as true until the assertion of its truth has become a commonplace. Now no one can doubt that there is great difficulty in adjusting the relations of the book of Genesis and the science of geology; and till that question is settled it would be monstrous for the Government to put forward the Bible on the terms proposed. To a European such difficulties may not present themselves as very formidable. He may, and often does say—and very justly—I find that the great spiritual and moral doctrines of the Bible appeal both to my experience and to my conscience, and I will be contented to treat its relations to physical science as of comparatively little importance. A Hindoo cannot hold this language. Cosmogony is exactly the part of theology which most attracts his imagination; and it is the

subject of all others on which he expects anything claiming to be a revelation to be at once authentic and precise. To treat the cosmogony of a book held out to him as infallible, as the geology of the book of Genesis is often treated, would appear to him an inconsistency at once ludicrous and blasphemous. Most of all would this be the case when the missionaries of the race which makes this declaration to him always attack his own religion on the ground of its inconsistency with physical science.

It must be observed that these remarks are directed, not against the efforts of private persons in their private capacity to convert the natives of India, but against any official declaration by the Government of a theological proposition. The two things stand on entirely different grounds. The private missionary may, and if he is a man of sense no doubt does, accompany his preaching with such qualifications and explanations as may be requisite, but Government cannot do that. It can only lay down dogmas. It can say, "This book is our Koran, or our Veda," but it cannot explain, qualify, and argue; and therefore its enunciation of principles must always be made at a disadvantage which would be ludicrous if the matter were not so serious.

May 26, 1860.

XVII.

MENTAL STATURE.

SINCE it became usual to write history and biography upon pictorial principles, the classifications of character which spring from party or personal predilections have come to wear a somewhat pedantic appearance. Mr. Carlyle has done more than any other writer to introduce the plan of looking, as the phrase is, at the essence of men's characters, to the neglect of the accidental phases of opinion or feeling which, by the force of circumstances, may have been associated with them. All his characters are drawn upon the supposition that every individual forms a whole, of which we can predicate all kinds of qualities which do not attach to any part of him in particular, but to the man himself, considered as an indivisible unit. For example, Mr. Carlyle would never content himself with saying of any man that he had a strong understanding, an imagination of average power, rather warm affections, a good deal of stinginess, and an inveterate habit of lying; but if he came across a person whom that description would suit, he would never rest till he had found some point of view from which he could take in all the various parts of the man's character as a

single well-connected whole, capable of being placed before the world by a few vigorous characteristic epithets.

Much may be said in favour of this mode of proceeding, when it is carried on by a man of genius. It is incomparably lively and interesting. By the help of something which has no definite name, but which is to writing what gesture and mimicry are to conversation, it gives much information which is too delicate to be condensed into precise statements; and it illustrates the fact that the language by which we describe each other in common life is incomplete, far less exact than the precision of its terms would lead us to suppose it to be, and likely to make us forget that men are, after all, individuals, and not mere collections of qualities. It cannot be surprising that such a mode of viewing character should be extremely popular, not merely because it is new and gives little trouble to the reader, but because it has a strong and direct tendency to exalt the dignity of the writer. To take in a man's whole nature in one single view, and to describe it by a few bold, ingenious, and comprehensive phrases, implies higher powers, and appeals to wider sympathies, than the mere enumeration and measurement of a number of detached qualities. The process, however, has its weak as well as its strong points. Its value depends entirely on the genius with which it is applied, and it puts the reader at the mercy of the author. It is a method which places those who employ it beyond the reach of controversy or refutation. It is always possible to examine specific assertions, and to test specific

inferences, but when the assertions range over the whole of a man's life, and the inferences extend to the whole of his character, it is all but impossible to attack either the one or the other. It is possible to argue the question whether, in a particular instance, Robespierre acted right or wrong; but who can possibly controvert the assertion that he was a "logic-formula"—especially against a man who is so satisfied that he was one, that he has constructed a theory of his whole life and conduct upon that supposition?

The truth is that, as painting can never supersede anatomy, so the study of human beings as individuals can never supersede the necessity for an independent study of the separate qualities which belong to them and distinguish them from each other. For serious and practical purposes, it is necessary not merely to know how people look, and how they affect the imagination, but also why they do so; and though pictorial accounts of human beings, taken individually, may suggest the direction which inquiries of this kind ought to take, they do not in themselves satisfy them. Their true value, apart from the pleasure which they give, appears to lie in the fact that they indicate more emphatically than any other process yet discovered, what the points are in any one man which really interest others, and that they thus suggest an examination of the causes by which people are put into a position in which others are attracted to and interested in them.


Such inquiries would, of course, range over an immense number of subjects; but it may not be uninteresting, in order to illustrate the scope of the



foregoing remarks, to give a single illustration of the sort of topics which they would have to embrace. There is no one subject which Mr. Carlyle so much delights to draw as the hero or great man. He always specifies what may be called the moral size of his characters, and he has probably never written a line which does not imply more or less directly that there is such a thing as general mental stature, apart from specific power in, or aptitude for, any particular mental quality or exercise. It is impossible to deny that there is some truth in this opinion. The assertion that Robespierre was essentially a small man, and Mirabeau essentially a large one, does undoubtedly convey a strong impression to the mind, though it is not easy to say in what it consists, and though its limits may be indefinite. If any one to whom such an impression had been conveyed by the portraits of Mr. Carlyle, or of any similar artist, could succeed in detecting the elements of character which are essential to its production, he would make a real addition to our knowledge. The utmost that can be attempted here is to indicate some of the branches of such a speculation.

Of the various classifications which have been made of human nature, one of the least inconvenient is that which views it under the heads of the reason, the imagination, the feelings, and the will. Whether it is complete or not, it is, at any rate, sufficiently wide to justify the assertion that, if greatness is in itself a specific quality which distinguishes some men from others, it will be traceable in one or more of these departments, or in the relations and proportions which they bear to each other. Taking, then, great-

ness in its relation to the intellect, what sort of intellect is required in order that a man may be great? That there are some kinds of intellect which, if they do not make a man great of themselves, would do so if they were used (a distinction which in itself would supply matter for a volume), is undeniable; but it is extremely difficult to say in what their specific peculiarity consists. Perhaps one of the most definite remarks that can be made on the subject is, that some of the powers of the intellect are positive, and scarcely admit of degrees, whilst others which do admit of degrees, and which are of the highest importance, may exist in the greatest force in men whom all the world agrees, and apparently with good reason, to consider as anything but great. The faculty of logic is an example of powers of the first kind. A man either has it or is without it, and though it is undoubtedly a great convenience, its possession in the fullest measure is consistent with extreme littleness of character, whilst a man might be very great without possessing it. To be logical means little more than to be consistent, to speak and to think habitually in such a manner that every specific thought can be referred to some more general conception, the truth of both of which the person who thinks is prepared to affirm. If, as is often the case, the specific thoughts are foolish, and the general conceptions absurd, there is no particular good in this. Its only effect is that bystanders have less difficulty than they would otherwise have in comprehending the extent of the folly of the person who possesses it. On the other hand, men may be habitually inconsistent, or rather inconsecutive, in their thoughts,



and yet have that about them which all the world recognizes as great. Some men are so constituted as to perceive great truths at first hand without viewing them—perhaps without caring to view them—under the form of premiss and conclusion; and thus their assertions take a fragmentary shape, which, though at times great in the highest degree, cannot with truth be described as logical. If any one will compare the Epistle to the Romans with any of the popular expositions of it, he will see what greatness there may be where there is but little logic, and what littleness may co-exist with perfect consistency.

On the other hand, intellectual qualities which vary in intensity, and of which all men possess a certain quantity, sometimes appear to produce greatness by their vigour, and sometimes not. That which is called by the general name of force of understanding is an instance of this. As a powerful man is one who can lift a great weight, so power of mind may be said to be that quality which enables people to do with comparative ease what others find it impossible or difficult to do at all. Its principal elements are the power of attention and that of application, which is attention in the active, and not in the passive shape. To be able to direct the thoughts to a given subject, and, according to that most expressive of metaphors, to “turn it over” in the mind, is one thing—to be able to submit the mind passively to that which is presented to it is another. Where the two co-exist in unusual vigour, they may be said to constitute power of mind. In many cases, the mere possession and exertion of this power makes a man great—in others the possession and exertion of an equal power has not

the same effect, or at least is not acknowledged to have it. It probably took at least as much mental labour—as much application and attention—to compose Comyn's *Digest* as to compose Gibbon's *History*. Yet, whilst every one acknowledges the greatness of the historian, few people would ascribe greatness to the judge. The most curious illustration of this, however, is to be found in the case of mathematicians. Newton is acknowledged to have been one of the greatest men that ever lived, and Mr. Adams's discovery of the new planet is universally looked upon as a splendid achievement; but the mere intellectual labour—the mental force necessary to reduce the discoveries from which these remarkable men derived their title to greatness from their original condition of conjectures to their ultimate condition of truths scientifically ascertained—probably did not exceed that which many men have put forth in the same branch of learning whose names are remembered principally by being labelled on some formula, like Taylor's theorem. Part of the explanation of these cases is that it is not the power alone, but the direction of the power also, by which the question of greatness is determined; and this direction is hardly an intellectual process. In the cases of Gibbon and Comyn, the cause which determined the one man to the path which led to permanent greatness, and the other to that which led merely to professional distinction, was partly moral, and partly external and circumstantial. Gibbon had 800*l.* a year of his own, he liked literary quiet, and did not care to marry. Comyn probably pursued his profession from the ordinary motives, which, as a general rule, would

produce more happiness than those which acted on Gibbon. In the case of the mathematicians, the difference lies in the imagination. The real greatness of Newton's achievement was not that he did a very hard sum and did it right, but that he had an imagination so powerful that he could conceive the possibility of devising a classification which should fit the motions of all heavy bodies whatever, from a sun to an apple.

Such is a single illustration of one small branch of the sort of inquiries which an analytical study of the problems presented by pictorial historians and biographers would suggest. A complete investigation of the subject would form a curious speculation, but it would require knowledge which hardly any one possesses.

June 2, 1860.

XVIII.

MINOR VIRTUES.

IN Mr. De Quincey's *Essay on Murder considered as one of the Fine Arts*, a master is introduced who lectures his servant on the impropriety of indulging too freely in a habit which is treated throughout as being at worst an amiable and artistic weakness. "I must, however," he observes, "warn you against an intemperate indulgence in this pursuit. From murder the step to dishonesty is short and imperceptible. Dishonesty tends to bad language, and no one can tell how soon the downward course may end in downright incivility and unpunctuality. Many a man has owed his moral ruin to a murder of which he thought but little when he committed it." The estimate of incivility and unpunctuality indicated by this remarkable inversion of the ordinary conception of morality points to a whole class of qualities which, though they can hardly be called virtues, have probably a closer connection with prosperity than most of those which are acknowledged to have a right to that title. To be civil, punctual, economical in the management both of time and money, to be unprocrastinating—in a word, moral dexterity and handiness—are qualities of which the

convenience can hardly be over-rated, though they may not excite any particular admiration or reverence. What are the functions of these minor virtues, and why, notwithstanding their immense practical importance, are they universally recognized as being only minor virtues?

It is easy to describe their functions, for they have a general family likeness, and almost always work into each other as to produce a common result.

The essence of all of them lies in a quick apprehension and recognition of the application of principles to details; and they are to morality what the power of rapid calculation is to mathematics. Thus the qualities which relate to the proper management of time—such as punctuality, the disposition (whatever it is to be called) which is opposed to loitering, and the power of working up spare moments for useful purposes—are all detailed applications of energy and resolution. A man who does at twelve o'clock what he engaged to do at that hour attaches to his own resolutions a clearer sense and a more definite and precise signification than one who sets about it at a quarter-past twelve. A man who sits down to a piece of work, and never leaves it till it is completed, has a more permanent and conscious determination to get through it than one who occasionally allows his mind to turn away from his task to some other object of attention. The importance of thus working out in detail the principles upon which all effort depends is not only generally acknowledged, but is often exaggerated. The temper of our times leads us all to consider such qualities not merely as those which are most frequently useful, but as those which

are in their own nature most desirable and important. It is less common either to perceive or to inquire what is their specific tendency; but it is, nevertheless, definite and plain. They tend to success, but to nothing else. They enable a man to do whatever he undertakes in an easy, triumphant manner; but they do not determine his aims or his destiny in life. They give a man his place in his class, but they do not fix the class to which he belongs. This explains the subordinate position which ordinary language assigns to these qualities, and points at the same time to some limitations upon their importance which are usually overlooked; probably because the virtues in question are at once so useful and so difficult of attainment, that it is not considered safe to admit that their excellence is subject to any qualifications whatever.

That which determines the class into which a man is to be put can be indicated only vaguely. It is described by such words as genius, capacity, mental stature, and the like. It is impossible to say precisely what the difference is between a large and a small-minded man; but the fact that there is such a difference, and that it can no more be removed by any training whatever, than the difference between an oak and an elm, is unquestionable. Some men have more and wiser thoughts and stronger impulses, as others have larger bones and harder muscles, than their neighbours; but the promptness with which they use their powers and apply them to the details of the various subjects which come before them does not appear to bear any constant assignable relation to this distinction. A wise, and even a clever man,

may be dilatory and slovenly, just as a strong man may be clumsy or may stammer. Mental and moral, like bodily dexterity, is simply an element of power, and it is that element which lies next to its immediate practical application. The limitations which are thus imposed on the value of the popular qualities in question deserve more acknowledgment than they have received.

The first of these limitations is, that such qualities are nothing in themselves. Robert Hall used to say of early rising, that the real question was not what time you get up, but what you do when you are up; and, in the same way, it should be remembered that to keep your appointment is infinitely less important than to be able to do your business when you have kept it. It is, generally speaking, better to do a thing well and late than to do it punctually and ill. It is important not only to admit this, but to dwell upon it, because the minor qualities are much better able to plead their own cause than the greater ones. The effects of real ability and sound judgment are often slow, and not immediately obvious. The effect of punctuality is instantaneous. It produces direct and immediate agreeable results to all the parties concerned. It greases the wheels of life sensibly and effectually, and thus frequently obtains a degree of credit which it is far from deserving. There are, on the other hand, many cases in which the highest qualities are lavishly employed upon results of which the importance is never tested. A man may wisely employ deep thought and great mental labour in providing for contingencies which may, after all, not arise, or which he may prevent so effectually as

to discredit the very precautions by which he prevented them. If this is done in a slovenly and dilatory manner, the only impression conveyed to those who are aware of the fact will be unfavourable; whilst foolish measures, the absurdity of which is undetected by the event, will often, if punctually carried out, give a man a high character for prudence and energy. In days like these, when the mechanism of life has been so greatly improved, and when there is comparatively little room for the exhibition of the larger individual qualities, the smaller ones are invested with greater practical importance than they ever possessed before; and thus it becomes doubly necessary to remember that their only real value is derivative, and that they have no more power to do the business of life than a pulley has to lift a weight. All that they can do is to regulate the direction and expenditure of the force which is the real cause of motion.

The minor virtues are, in some cases, and for some purposes, undesirable—possibly even mischievous. In practical life this can hardly be the case, though even there they may and frequently do degenerate into priggishness, and lead people to suppose that the tool, and not the hand, or the mind which guides the hand, does the work; but in matters of thought, speculation, and literature, the exception to their utility is wider. There was a time when people believed that genius was essentially irregular, and perhaps no affectation is more puerile and more pernicious than that of despising common rules in order to get credit for possessing genius. The affectation and the belief are both out of fashion now, but there

was a sort of foundation for each. The specific advantage of the minor virtues is their tendency to produce success and triumph; but these are not always desirable, and they are often especially undesirable for men whose lives are passed in thought. A man who by nature or early habit does everything neatly, completely, and punctually, whose mind has no loose ends, and who undertakes nothing that he does not perform, may be happy and useful, but he is a little apt to be blind to many things which he would see if he were less estimable and less respectable. The power of concentrating the mind on a given subject for a given time, finishing it off, and turning to something else, is a great gift; but the man who dawdles, and loiters, and turns aside to other things, has a few set-offs. The mind is not a mere machine, and it cannot be used as if it were one. Our thoughts neither are, nor ought to be, entirely in our own control. At least, if a man chooses to tyrannize over himself, he must take the consequence. He will miss much that would otherwise have occurred to him. He will think and feel less deeply and less comprehensively than he would have felt. He will no doubt have done his work to the time. He will have walked his mental four miles in the hour, but he will have little notion of the road by which he has come. Perhaps no two men ever exemplified the advantages and disadvantages of the two tempers of mind more perfectly than Southey and Coleridge. Southey was as punctual, as businesslike, as prompt and industrious a man as ever lived. His life was blameless, manly, and honest, and his works are miracles of literary workmanship. Coleridge, on the other

hand, passed his whole life out at elbows, morally and physically. He was inexact, he loitered, he wasted his time, he undertook schemes of all sorts which he never carried out; and when he died he left behind him a heap of "remains," literary and philosophical, unfinished, dishevelled, and confused. For all this, however, Coleridge was far the greater man of the two; and it is difficult to deny that if there was not a direct connection, there was at least a strong sympathy, between his genius and his slovenliness. He had a gift for seeing the difficulties of life, its seamy side, its incongruities and contradictions, which he would probably have lost if he had been more respectable and victorious. If a man has to do justice to the world in which he lives, he must have a sympathy for the sceptical and unsuccessful view of things which a sturdy and resolute man is almost certain to despise. It is no doubt the great mystery of life that, whenever any good quality is traced up far enough, it is found to involve bad consequences. Good and evil are interwoven not merely in our conduct and our feelings, but, as it would seem, in our very faculties and in the constitution of our minds. It may be said of all sermons, lay or clerical, that have ever been preached, that, fortunate as it might be for mankind if the preacher's advice were generally followed, it would be unfortunate if it were followed universally.

July 14, 1860.

XIX.

C O U R A G E .

COURAGE is one of the commonest words in the language. The quality which it denotes is the object of more general admiration and ambition than any other. It is a virtue which is at once common and honourable in the highest degree, and it produces results so broad and striking, that every one considers himself, and, in some points of view, has a right to consider himself, entitled to form an opinion as to its existence and extent. It seems as if it were from personal experience that the distinction is continually drawn between moral and physical courage, to the advantage of the former. The distinction is interesting, not only in relation to the subject to which it refers, but also because it affords a curious and almost a solitary, specimen of the kind of contributions which mere casual observation can make to the examination of mental qualities. The distinction is usually drawn in some such terms as these. Physical courage is readiness to expose oneself to the chance of physical pain or death, and arises principally from the nature of the bodily constitution. Moral courage is readiness to expose oneself to suffering or inconvenience which does not

affect the body. It arises from firmness of moral principle, and is independent of the physical constitution. The courage of a soldier in battle is usually taken as the illustration of the one—the courage of a religious man who incurs ridicule by the profession of his belief is the standing example of the other.

It would not be easy to cite any other instance in which an analytical remark on a moral quality has become a commonplace, and it would be still more difficult to cite any attempt to analyze a moral quality which is more entirely unsatisfactory. The distinction between moral and physical courage is, in fact, a distinction without a difference. It does not describe two separate qualities, but only two manifestations of the same quality, which are not only not inconsistent with, but can be hardly said to be independent of, each other. Nothing is more easy than to put cases which show that there are many forms of courage to which this distinction has no application. If a soldier risks his life in storming a battery, that, it is said, is physical courage. If a man risks infamy for the sake of friendship or religious principle, that is moral courage. Suppose a man risks his life—as in the case of persecution—for religious principle, is that moral or physical courage? If it is called moral courage, then moral courage may be shown in encountering the risk of physical pain. If it is called physical courage, then physical courage may be independent of the bodily constitution. Most persons would probably accept the first branch of the alternative, and admit that moral courage may be shown in encountering the risk of physical pain; and this is certainly the most

plausible view of the case, for no doubt there would seem to be a contrast between the state of mind of the martyr and of the soldier, which does not appear on comparing the martyr in person with the martyr in prospects and reputation. If, however, it is admitted that moral courage may be shown in encountering physical risk, what is the distinction between that form of moral courage and physical courage?

The soldier storming the breach is the standard example of physical courage. Its specific characteristic must, therefore, be always present in such an act. The last case referred to shows that the presence of the risk of bodily pain is not that characteristic, for that is present in the action of the martyr. It must, therefore, be looked for elsewhere. It may be said to lie in the intense tumultuous excitement which bodily conflict or the immediate prospect of it produces in many minds. The courage of a soldier on such occasions is often compared to that of a fierce wild beast, which rushes in unreflecting fury on its antagonist. This view, however, is refuted by several observations. In the first place, tumultuous excitement of feeling is by no means confined to scenes of bodily conflict. It frequently exists in what are looked upon as the special theatres of moral courage, such as parliaments, courts of law, and all assemblies in which the public business of life is transacted. Suppose, for example, a man is party to an action on which his character depends, and that in the course of the trial he becomes vehemently excited and roused by the imputations cast upon him. Suppose, lastly, that he has it in his power, by taking or directing his counsel to take up, a certain line

of conduct—for example, by producing or suppressing certain evidence—to destroy his antagonist's case at the imminent risk of utterly ruining his own character for ever, and that unjustly. Would the adoption of that course be an act of moral or of physical courage? Almost any one would call it *moral* courage, yet here are present all the elements the presence of which must be relied upon to prove that it is an act of *physical* courage: to storm a breach. There is the same tumultuous excitement, the same fierce animosity, the same fixing of the mind on the destruction of an antagonist to the neglect of all consequences to self, in the one case as in the other; and, it may be added, there is the same brevity in the act. The question is asked and the determination is taken in as short a time, and with as little opportunity for reflection or hesitation, as is afforded by the rush from the trenches to the wall.

This, however, is not all. It occasionally happens not only that tumultuous excitement is present where bodily risk is absent, but that imminent bodily risk produces no excitement. If a regiment were ordered to storm a breach, and did storm it, the probability is, that every man in the line would approach it with different feelings. In some—though probably their number would be small—savage and frantic excitement would overpower every other feeling. There would probably be a few who would be in a state of abject terror, and who would advance only under the stings of shame and conscience, or the pressure of discipline. In the others, these and many other feelings would be mixed up in every conceivable variety of proportion. Excitement, fear, a sense of

duty, emulation, ambition, possibly even curiosity, would all have their places, and each would in its turn give the prevailing colour to their minds for a longer or shorter interval according to circumstances. Ought, then, the storming of the breach to be described as an act of physical courage in some, of moral courage in others, and of a mixture of physical and moral courage in almost all the members of the regiment? It would perhaps be necessary so to describe it if a classification so inconvenient and unreasonable had to be maintained; but the real conclusion from these instances is, that the classification itself is baseless, and proceeds upon no principle at all. To say that courage is either moral or physical is like saying that professions are either active or speculative—a remark which is not quite unmeaning, but which would be altogether wide of its mark if it were intended to show what is the special characteristic of professions and what is the principle on which they ought to be classified.

If any one wished to give a really instructive account of courage, or of any other moral quality, he would have to take the matter up in a manner altogether different. A few hints upon the subject may be given here, but a complete examination of it is impracticable. The most general notion which can be formed of courage is, that it is that mental quality which prompts men to do, or that mental habit which consists in doing, that which, for any reason, they have determined to do, notwithstanding the certainty or the probability that consequences which the person acting dislikes or wishes to avoid will be incurred in doing it. Hence, courage requires

three things—a course of conduct determined on, certain or probable consequences of an unwelcome kind, and perseverance in spite of them. Much might be said upon each of these three heads in illustration of the different forms which courage may assume, and by way of comparison of their respective importance, their frequency, and the title which they convey to respect and approbation—each of which considerations is independent of the others, for it may well be that the commonest kind of courage is most important, and that the rarest is the least respectable. But this is an immense subject. It will be sufficient at present to make a single observation upon the second branch of it.

It is essential to courage that the act determined on should be attended by certain or probable consequences of an unwelcome kind. Now there are two senses in which a consequence may be unwelcome. It may be unwelcome to a particular person, or it may be unwelcome to so large a proportion of mankind as to be generally reputed to be unwelcome, without specific proof that it is so in a given case. Thus it might give A exquisite pain to meet B in the street, and he might show the highest courage in running the risk of such a meeting; but it would be necessary to show that this was so. The mere statement of the fact would not prove that any danger at all had been encountered. On the other hand, the bare statement that A had voluntarily risked the loss or mutilation of his limbs would gain for him the reputation of having done a brave thing. Hence, a particular set of actions involving what are generally viewed as unpleasant consequences come to be

specially distinguished as "brave," but these consequences are not in fact unpleasant in the same degree to all persons at all times, or even to the same persons at all times. This introduces a curious question—"How far is sensibility an element of courage?" Some men mind physical pain much more than others, and there can be no doubt that if ten people had to submit to the same surgical operation, each would have to make a mental effort of a different degree of intensity for the purpose. Suppose that the efforts were measured by the numbers 1, 2, 3, up to 10, and that all submitted to the operation, would No. 10 have shown ten times as much courage as No. 1; or would not the fact that he had ten times as great a dislike to pain be in itself a deduction from his courage? Suppose, again, that the first eight submitted to the operation, and that the two last did not, but that each made an effort to submit equal to 8 (the necessary efforts in their cases being equal to 9 and 10 respectively), would they have shown more courage than No. 7, or not? or would they have shown as much as No. 8, who did submit when they did not? Such questions resolve themselves ultimately into the question, What are the limits of human personality? How far is a man to be identified with his own body, and how far can its defects be said to be his? The common use of language takes no notice of the difficulty. A man with vigorous health, strong nerves, and great indifference to pain is called brave; and no one has a right to say that the word is improperly used; for the habitual use of this, as of all words, determines its meaning. The conclusion seems to be that lan-

guage, especially in reference to the mental constitution, is popular and unscientific; and that, though it furnishes materials for speculation, it can never furnish either moral or scientific conclusions.

September 8, 1860.


XX.

THE VANITY OF HUMAN WISHES.

It is often interesting to inquire what was the meaning of commonplaces which have, as it were, been worn out. The "vanity of human wishes" is a phrase which sounds as threadbare as the "mutability of human affairs;" but, old and well-established as it is, it has, like other moral commonplaces, gone out of fashion in our times. It is one of the peculiarities of the age in which we live, that the reflections and phrases which fall from us most naturally no longer express humiliation, or even virtuous indignation, but are almost always conceived in a vein of self-applause. We speak no longer of the vanity of human wishes, of the evils of luxury, of good old times, and modern degeneracy, but of the triumphs of civilization, of modern enlightenment, and the law of progress. Possibly, in another generation or two, historical speculators may be struck with this fact, and may discuss, with plausible arguments on both sides, the question whether the people of the nineteenth century really thought that the railways which they had invented would take them all to heaven. In the meantime, it is as well to remember that

whenever the humour of mankind may change, a large stock of commonplaces, with about the same amount of truth and falsehood in them as those to which they are at present accustomed, will be ready for use on the other side of most of the subjects on which they are in the habit of speaking. At all events, when a commonplace is out of fashion, its value may be examined with greater convenience than in the height of its popularity, as it is free from the prejudice which popularity excites. It is impossible not to feel a grudge against the sentiments which point the morals of popular lecturers and after-dinner moralists. On the other hand, we are affected with a certain kindliness towards phrases dignified by association with writers whose fame rests principally on the fact that they gave to common thoughts as graceful an expression as they were capable of receiving.


The commonplace about the vanity of human wishes is probably as old as human language, and has certainly found a place, in various shapes, in the works of many of the greatest of all writers from the days of Solomon to our own. The Book of Ecclesiastes, Plato's myth of the choice of lives by the souls who were about to drink of the waters of Lethe as a preparation for re-entering human bodies, and the Tenth Satire of Juvenal, are well-known instances of it in ancient literature. Amongst Englishmen in the last century, the sentiment was frequently reproduced with more or less of that classical grace and finish which so often gave them the air, not exactly of insincerity, but of not caring very much which way their sincere belief for the time



being inclined. Perhaps as good examples as any are Addison's meditation over the tombstones in Westminster Abbey, and Johnson's imitations of Juvenal. Even in our own days, a characteristic vehicle has been found for a vein of feeling with which our generation has, on the whole, little sympathy. Hardly any one in these times ventures to moralize openly; but Mr. Thackeray infused into *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis* as much of his reading of the Book of Ecclesiastes as could conveniently be allied with the flirtations of Becky Sharpe and the cigars of Mr. Pendennis.

The gist of all condemnatory commonplaces is to convict average people of absurdity or inconsistency in their everyday conduct, and this is the application which has most commonly been made of the doctrine in question by its most forcible preachers. Juvenal, perhaps, has preached it as vigorously as any one else—the more so, no doubt, because the whole constitution of his mind exemplified that one-sided vehemence and absence of subtlety which belonged to so many Latin writers. “Why do you wish for wealth, which ruined Seneca? or for power, which destroyed Sejanus? or for eloquence, which brought Demosthenes and Cicero to their graves? or to be a great general like Hannibal, who was defeated and exiled? or for beauty or long life, of which the first produces ruin, whilst the second ends in imbecility? You should take life as it comes, and be a Stoic superior to pleasure, desire, and anger.” Such is the essence of his famous poem, and such—though the sententious moral is generally omitted—is the suggestion of most of the writers who have at different times adopted

the same sentiment. "What fools you, the mass of mankind, are for caring so much for things which, when you have got them, are such transitory possessions and such doubtful benefits!" When the illustrations appended to such a text are well chosen and dramatically worked out, as in Juvenal's poem, the general drift of the sermon derives a degree of weight from its separate parts to which it is not fairly entitled. The true answer to such a lesson is, that people are in reality less ambitious and more successful than it assumes them to be. Human wishes are hardly ever directed to great objects—at least, not continuously and consciously. When a lad goes into the army, he does not expect, in one case out of a hundred thousand, to be a Hannibal or a Charles XII. The state of his feelings generally is that it is a gentlemanlike thing to be in the army—that officers are fine fellows—that it would be exciting to see the world, and go through a certain number of campaigns. He must have some profession. He is not fond of books. His connections have some interest, and do not want to send him to college, because his other brothers are there, and are expensive. He accordingly gets a commission, and likes his profession pretty well. He does garrison duty at Malta or Corfu, fights with natives in New Zealand, serves some years in India, marries, goes upon half-pay, and settles down in middle life somewhere in the country or the colonies with a moderate income composed of his own and his wife's property, his half-pay, and possibly the interest of some windfall in the shape of prize-money or a legacy. Such, with variations, is the history of an average officer in the army.



He gets pretty much what he expected to get, and in about the time in which he expected to get it. In every other walk of life, the same thing happens in average cases, and these, of course, are numerically the vast majority. People live on with occasional pleasures and occasional sorrows, but their average condition is one of quiet and tolerable satisfaction. The proof of this lies in the fuss which they make about it when it is disturbed. In our age and country, it is not only assumed, but insisted upon, that every one has a right to live—and to live in a considerable degree of comfort. If we hear of people being starved to death, or even of their lives being shortened by want of proper food, clothing, lodging, or medical attendance, there is a constant clamour and outcry upon the subject; and, in point of fact, an immense proportion of those who are born not only contrive to live, but in most cases to rear families. If it were ascertained that ten per cent. of the population died from want of necessaries, we should all be horror-struck; yet the great majority of human wishes are directed towards the provision of necessaries of one sort or another, and may therefore be assumed to be fulfilled.

When the contrary is assumed, the proposition is tacitly confined to an infinitesimally small proportion of mankind. What is meant is not that all human wishes are frustrated or fail to be accomplished, but that, if people set their hearts upon some one object, devote their lives to its attainment, and actually succeed beyond all expectation in attaining it, it often happens that they find their success does not satisfy them after all. This, however, would not prove that

human wishes are vain, but only that they are not complete. Hannibal and Charles XII. wished, it is said, to be great generals, and their wishes were vain, because they met with reverses in war and died ingloriously. The second half of the contrast does not match the first. It is as if a man should say, How foolish it is to wish for good health, for A. B. had very good health, yet his wife ran away with C. D. It was not the object of the life of Charles XII. to avoid being defeated and to die in his bed. His object was to be a great general, and he attained his object. Men are not like children who look in at shop windows and wish for the goods exposed there without wishing to pay for them. When a man wishes for distinction, he should, in point of prudence, and generally does in point of fact, wish not for a naked result miraculously thrown in his way, but for the result attended with its usual and natural consequences. Probably, if Charles XII. had had full notice beforehand of all the events of his career, he would have said that, though there were some unpleasant things about it, it was, on the whole, better suited to his tastes than a quiet life of uniform prosperity.

It ought, however, to be remembered that a tacit assumption lies at the root of almost all general criticisms on human affairs which is in itself untrue. Such poems as Juvenal's go upon the supposition that people exercise much more forethought about the circumstances of their lives than they really do. A man does not at any given moment sit down and say—"I think it will make me happy to be a great general, and accordingly I will be a great general."

Nine-tenths of the elements of the question are settled for him. He adopts his profession for a hundred obscure reasons, of which he himself is hardly conscious. He is led on from one thing to another, partly by circumstances, partly by feeling, partly by inclination, and partly by duty, and finds himself, before he is well aware of it, in a position in which he has little choice left him, so that the misfortunes which may happen to him illustrate not so much the vanity of human wishes as the complication of human affairs. It is curious to observe the difference between the principles on which people speculate about life and those on which they act when engaged in its business. A spectator almost always attaches infinitely more importance than an actor to the dramatic completeness of life. People constantly look at the history of a man's career as if its character depended principally on its catastrophe. A man's life is looked upon as successful if it ends triumphantly, and as a failure if it ends gloomily. In point of fact, if a man lives seventy years, his seventieth year contains neither more nor less than one-seventieth part of his life, and will affect its success or failure to that and to no greater extent. Almost every one concentrates all the interest which he takes in his affairs on the present and the immediate future. The past gives him only a starting-point. Few people have either imagination or sensibility enough to comprehend or to care for the general dramatic effect which their lives may present, or be capable of presenting.

If most speculations on the vanity of human wishes convey the impression that their authors confined their attention to a small part of mankind, and that even

as to these they took partial views, there is a way in which the same conclusion may be and has been put, which is not open to such a criticism. It may not be true that the particular plans which people form for themselves in life are either foolish or doomed to disappointment; but it is a great and important truth—and it is one which in these days is continually forgotten—that no rational account can be given of the objects of life itself. If the question *cui bona?* is probed far enough, no answer can be given to it. The ultimate value of the objects which we pursue, and which for the most part we succeed in obtaining, is altogether unknown; and in this sense we may, if we like, say of everything, *vanitas vanitatum*, though it is doubtful whether it is worth while to do so. This conclusion, however, can affect nothing but the general tone of the mind which admits it. It shows only that our life is surrounded on all sides by a thick darkness which affects everything alike. In this sense, idleness is vanity quite as much as energy—pain as much as pleasure. It was in this mood that it was said we are such stuff as dreams are made of, and our little life is rounded with a sleep.

September 29, 1860.



XXI.

JUNIORES PRIORES.

THERE is a marked tendency in the literature, in the speculation, and in the enterprises of the present day to pay an unusual degree of attention to the early years of life. The hideous adjective, "educational," and its even more hideous substantive, "educationist," are illustrations of one form of this tendency. The instinctive eagerness with which almost every popular writer addresses himself to the sympathies and depicts the feelings of the young, exemplifies another. We are overwhelmed with the results of minute observations on the nursery and the school-room. Popular writers who beg for the tears of the public almost uniformly draw their most touching scenes from infant death-beds, and dwell with revolting sweetness long drawn out upon the miniature passions of boys and girls who have hardly entered upon their teens. In short, the importance of the young is at a maximum; and if, in the course of a few more decades, the world is not peopled by a generation infinitely superior to those which have preceded it, it will not be from any want of interest or exertion on the part of the existing adults towards the existing adolescents.

The good side of this movement requires no illustration. It would be impossible to say anything about the importance of education without falling into the dreariest of all commonplaces; but, like most other good things, it has its attendant evils—evils which have an injurious effect upon education itself, upon those who receive, and upon those who give it. Perhaps the best illustration of this is to be found in the character and tendency of the novels which are at present so popular about life at school and at college. In the last generation, and in the works of our older writers, scenes of this kind were introduced principally as affording an opportunity for burlesque description. The common form used by Captain Marryat, for example, in describing his hero's school-days, consists principally of accounts of the tricks which he played upon the master and the usher, and of the tyrannical punishments which he incurred in return. A modern novel about school or college life is written in a totally different temper. If the scene is a school, it will be intimated that success and good behaviour at school have the closest possible relation to success and goodness in future life; whilst deep moral meanings will be attached to all the ups and downs in lessons and in play. If it is a university, the incidents may be constructed on rather a larger scale, and more play may be given to serious passions and feelings; but the same sort of importance will be attached to matters intrinsically petty, whilst the whole will be pervaded by the same fundamental assumption, that the period passed at college is necessarily of the utmost importance, and that the part which an undergraduate plays there almost deter-

mines the part which he will play in after life. The solemnity with which these books are written, and the tone by which they are pervaded, prove that their authors fall into the error of greatly overvaluing the relative importance of very early life. For it is true, though it is a truth which many people seem to forget, that maturity is more important than youth—that the importance of youth depends principally on the fact that it is an introduction to maturity—that many of the habits and many of the qualities which have most to do with the success and happiness of mature life, though they may exist in youth, lie beyond the reach of educators—and that they are called out by the events of manhood far more than by the education received in youth. In short, a man's character has in it infinitely more than his schools and schoolmasters put there. And the closest observation and most assiduous drill during the first two or three and twenty years of his life constantly fail to bring it out.

These are, of course, unwelcome reflections to the whole generation of what, to use their own phraseology, must be called educationists, for they impose limits upon education, the existence of which educationists habitually neglect or deny. They show that it is not the business of education to form the character, for some of the most important parts of it are formed after the age of education is over. For a similar reason, it is not the business of education to give to those who receive it a chart by which the course to be steered in life is indicated. The solution of that problem depends in a great measure upon experience, which can be obtained only by each man

for himself, as he comes within the influence of the great passions and interests of mature life.

On the other hand, one of the most essential characteristics of education is that it should be adapted to the immature and incomplete character of those who receive it; so that the college and the school are, after all, little more than continuations of the nursery, differing from real life by the elimination of a certain number of the elements which make up its interest. The nursery excludes almost all these elements; the school excludes most of them; and even a university excludes several of the most important. Students have no professions; they have no families; they live under a system of artificial rewards, which give a fictitious value to certain specific talents quite independent of their real importance in life, whilst they leave unnoticed other qualities of infinitely greater consequence. Hence the world of school and college is, and must be, to a great extent, a make-believe world—constructed, with more or less ingenuity, to imitate the real world, but affording an inadequate, and, in some respects, a fallacious and even misleading test as to the capacity of its inhabitants for usefulness and success outside of it. Educators of every degree are naturally inclined to forget this, and to endeavour to enhance their own importance by adopting the highest notion of the importance of their task. They assume, for the most part with little foundation, that they know what life is and how to prepare their pupils for it; whereas their own views are generally narrow and technical, and their opportunities for impressing them on their pupils limited. If they could reconcile them-

selves to the reflection that they have a limited task to perform—that their most important duties are negative, and that the young birds whom they have hatched properly belong to, and will pass most of their lives in, an element of which they know comparatively little—the education which they would give would be less pretentious and more useful.

It is not, however, in its effects upon education that the exaggerated importance attached to the young and their doings is most injurious. It exercises a worse and a more important influence on the minds of those who entertain it. To gain the ear of a certain number of young disciples, and to set up some scheme of education founded on his particular views, is the mode of proceeding adopted by almost every social reformer.* There are many people in the present day, in almost every walk of life, who appear to feel that they have no chance of getting a hearing from grown-up men and women, and who think that possibly boys and girls may furnish the fulcrum which their little schemes require in order to move the world. A large proportion of the clergy take this course. They are indefatigable (and their industry and benevolence are highly honourable to them) in educating and lecturing young people. But here they stop. To use a well-known platform phrase, middle-aged men are a “neglected class.” In boyhood, every one is taught and lectured to the utmost limit that can be supposed to be good for him. Very young men are often enlisted by some reformer or speculator, who sets them to work upon schemes of his own for improving the condition of mankind;

* See Essay on Gamaliels, p. 234.

but after that period of life, a man is supposed to have got beyond the province of advice. The most anxious philanthropists have nothing whatever to say to him, and even the clergy appear to think that, if he has a soul to be saved, it is no business of theirs to save it. It is not so with the other learned professions. The doctor's services are distributed impartially over life. The lawyer has no objection to male and middle-aged clients; nor do politics or commerce turn their backs upon the unromantic age and sex.

If grown-up men are so important an element in life as a possibly unreasonable prejudice suggests, will no one undertake the improvement of their condition? There are obvious difficulties in the case, but they are difficulties which reformers and philanthropists should be prepared to meet, if their reforms and their philanthropy are real and sound. A grown-up man, who has mixed in the real business of the world, generally knows a quack when he sees him, sees through mere verbiage, and has made up his mind that there are a good many evils in life which it is hopeless to try to cure. If such a man is asked to take a great deal of trouble, to spend a great deal of time, to introduce considerable changes into his habits of conduct and modes of thought, the request must be based upon grounds which will bear the fullest discussion and the strongest adverse criticism. When people address themselves by preference to feeble, immature, or ignorant hearers, the inference which unavoidably suggests itself is, that they are not prepared for this, and that they are internally conscious, either that their case is weak, or

that they do not know how to defend it. If a case is really strong, it can be proved to the satisfaction of mature minds. We have seen an abundance of great political changes, but they were effected by men, and not by boys. We have also seen an abundance of puny sects, which were hardly born before they died; and their common characteristic has been that they began in the influence of a few clever men over a circle of susceptible youths. It is a wise remark, that the fate of mankind depends much more upon the risen than on the rising generation, and if religious and social reformers want to find out what their plans are really worth, they should see how they affect men of their own age and station, instead of trying to prejudice in their favour a set of lads or girls who will outgrow them in the course of a few years.

It is hardly possible to estimate the importance of such a course to the reformers themselves. It would not only give them a test of the soundness of their own views, of which they are at present entirely destitute, but it would have an effect on their own minds of which they can hardly estimate the importance. Hardly anything is so fatal to continuous mental growth as constant contact with immature minds. It is the intellectual equivalent of keeping low company. A person whose life is passed amongst children or boys can hardly be expected to avoid the blunder of supposing that the superiority of which he is continually made conscious is absolute, and not relative. The feeling that he has to be constantly setting them an example is almost certain to delude him into the belief that he has an example to set;

whereas, in fact, his knowledge of life is often little wider, whilst his conjectures about it are less lively than those of his pupils. There is no one thing which it is more important for persons connected with education to remember than the truth that education is only a preparation for life, and that the life which lies beyond it is utterly unlike it, is very partially known to any one, and is, in general, particularly little known to themselves.

September 29, 1866.

XXII.

MORALITY AND SENSIBILITY.

THE question whether the world is more hypocritical than it used to be often forces itself upon the attention of those who observe the feelings of the present day. Philanthropists call upon Parliament for powers to interfere with the amusements of their neighbours, religious newspapers become a byeword for slander and libel, and men who appear in some points of view models of Christian zeal and charity seem to be altogether dead to the obligation of truth. Upon the other hand, a specially humane and Christian schoolmaster, whose life had, by his own account, been passed in devising a system of school-keeping upon physiological principles, not long ago* beat a boy to death, because, having water on the brain, he was perverse and stupid about saying his lessons; and having, for this specimen of practical physiological science, been sentenced to four years' penal servitude, he issued from "his narrow cell" a pamphlet which might be considered the ultimate perfection of cant.

The pamphlet affords a text for a curious inquiry.

* See the case of *R. v. Hopley*, tried at the Lewes summer assizes in 1860.

The plain common-sense criticism upon it is simply that it is the work of a hypocrite and a liar, and the common-sense criticism is both just and true. But lying and hypocrisy are seldom, if ever, simple phenomena. Probably no man sets himself consciously to pretend to be something which he is not. No one says to himself, "I am a cruel brute; but I observe that people are in various ways well paid for being humane and affectionate, therefore I will pretend to be humane and affectionate." There are so many departments of life for which cruelty and brutality are not disqualifications, and the effort of always pretending to non-existent feelings must be so wearisome, that, if a man really did arrive at so clear an opinion as to his own character, the probability is that he would rather seek means to indulge than to conceal it. We have all, in fact, sufficient self-respect to deceive ourselves more or less before we begin deceiving others, and falsehood and hypocrisy will generally be found to originate in harbouring in the mind incongruous feelings which, when indulged, produce results diametrically opposed to each other. Men, however, are so constituted that almost every one is actuated more or less by emotions which tend to produce contradictory and inconsistent results. A person who takes great interest in the affairs of others will be pleased so long as his neighbours act as he could wish, and will be angry when they act otherwise. In the first state of feeling, he may appear a zealous philanthropist; in the other, an intolerant bigot and persecutor, or, under special circumstances, a butcher and torturer. When the acts done in the second state of feeling are compared

with the language used in the first, people will call the man a hypocrite, and they will be right in doing so ; for, though there may have been a subjective connection between the soft words and the murderous blows, and though each may have been the genuine expression of the man's feeling for the time being, the rest of the world are not bound to speculate on such uncertainties. People are perfectly right in acting upon the principle that, if a man cares to be thought honest, there must not only be a connection between his words and his acts satisfactory to his own mind, but also a consistency between them which can be maintained upon grounds generally admitted by others. Thus it would be perfectly fair to call a man a hypocrite who, in the present day, was full of affectionate phrases about his fellow-creatures, and yet longed to put to a cruel death those who differed from him upon theological points ; but there may have been times when such a man would no more have been a hypocrite than a judge or a surgeon in the present day who inflicts tremendous suffering in a spirit of perfect benevolence.

Hardly any one can have failed to observe that this sort of semi-conscious hypocrisy is common in the present age—that bad conduct and high professions of principle, seen by every one else to be utterly inconsistent, but appearing to those who exemplify them perfectly homogeneous, are to be met with in all directions. How did this state of things come to exist ? Some of its causes are to be found in the circumstances of our times, and especially in the minute classification which is all but universal amongst us, and which is nowhere so

powerful as amongst the classes which make the greatest claims to religion and charity. The religious and the philanthropic worlds stand almost entirely apart from the world which makes no special claims to religion or philanthropy. Each considers that it possesses the secret of life, and that ordinary men are in a state of dense ignorance as to their true interests. If any one will read what is written on the subject of education, not only by mere quacks, but by men of really active benevolence, and in many respects of good judgment, he can hardly fail to be struck by the tone of contemptuous Pharisaical cruelty by which a great deal of it is pervaded. It constantly proceeds upon the assumption that children are, as it were, the young of the poor, who are to be rescued from their parents by the clergyman and the schoolmaster for the purpose of being brought up in decent principles, whilst the parents themselves are left to go their way to destruction. There is nothing which a thorough-bred philanthropist finds it so difficult to admit as the possibility that any one can know his own business better than he does, or can care more for its proper transaction.

Powerful as is the influence of this cause in producing hypocrisy, it is associated with another which lies somewhat deeper, and of which the operation may be traced in almost every department of thought and literature. This is the tendency of the present age to give to sensibility, as compared with morality, a degree of importance to which it is by no means entitled. The general nature of the opposition which exists between the two is obvious enough. Morality always tends, and infallibly must tend, to embody

itself in a system of fixed rules, which invariably imply that all persons, irrespectively of differences of position, character, and the like, are inexorably bound by them. In fact, morality is, on a large indefinite scale, exactly what law is upon a comparatively narrow one. Every system of morals claims obedience from all, and confers rights upon all. In fact, morality, duty, and positive rights are correlative terms, and cannot exist without each other. Morality, moreover, is rather negative than positive. It always speaks to forbid: "Thou shalt not kill," "Thou shalt not steal," "Thou shalt not covet." It rests upon and implies some active power, in virtue of which men will be inclined to those actions which, but for its intervention, would be qualified as murder, theft, or covetousness.

Sensibility is the opposite of morality, in its most essential particulars. It manifests itself in the form of passion. Love, hatred, active piety, philanthropy, misanthropy, charity, cruelty, and all other feelings, are forms of sensibility. Whatever may be the special form which it assumes, it is distinguished from morality by the fact that it imposes no duties, and confers no rights, and always impels instead of forbidding. Affection, either for individuals or for classes of men, is perhaps the most universal form of sensibility. That it is an active principle is self-evident. It always impels and never restrains, but is itself restrained by law or by morals. For this reason, it cannot be said to impose duties. Duties are imposed upon it. Love, for example, does not create the duties of marriage. It is an impulse and affection which cannot properly be said to tend to

anything but its own satisfaction. Experience and reflection have induced people, for the sake of the good of mankind, to surround it with the conditions and restrictions attached to marriage, and it is from these conditions and restrictions that the duties of married life arise. In the same way, love confers no rights. A right is the correlative of a duty. It is a power to obtain or to do something, which power is recognized, and, if necessary, protected by some exterior law. Thus it is the exterior law, or morality, which confers rights, and not sensibility. Sensibility and morality are thus complementary to each other, like the river and the dam, or the steam and the locomotive engine.

For several reasons, sensibility has, for many years past, got very much the upper hand of morality. Law, whether it takes the shape of legal or of moral rules, is always harsh and austere, and is therefore instinctively disliked by a lively, pathetic generation, intensely alive to its own joys and sorrows. Moreover, both law and morals have to be continually re-written to meet the various circumstances of mankind. As new relations arise and new sentiments prevail, it is necessary to remodel the old rules, just as the dams and embankments of a river must be altered as the water shifts its course. Till this is done, there is, of course, an opposition between law and morals on the one hand, and sensibility on the other. Every law makes hard cases, and the popular feeling is always on the side of sensibility, against both law and morals. For example, the law is that certain acts are murders, and that murderers shall be hung. Some years since, a woman who had

been seduced and brutally insulted afterwards by a soldier, shot him dead in the most deliberate manner. For this she was sentenced to be hung. The public voice demanded and obtained her pardon. "We were not thinking," people felt, "of such a case as that when we laid down the rule." It is, indeed, no easy and common thing to recognize the claims of law or of morals as such. Here and there a person of peculiar temperament gives them by nature the preference over sensibility, but, as a general rule, it requires practice and study to do so. The mass of mankind always yield unwillingly to general rules when they are opposed to their feelings, and submit to their authority only from a conviction that their feelings are apt to be capricious and unsteady, and that it would be unsafe to trust them too far.

It is this last reflection which explains to a great extent the contradiction noticed at the beginning of this essay. If mere feeling can be invested with a certain steady, consistent, business-like aspect, so as to give it something of the air of law and morals, people will trust it in preference to them; and this is precisely what is done by that state of feeling which calls into existence such bodies as the charitable and religious societies which exist amongst us, or the Social Science Association. It does not occur to ordinary people that men so staid and grave—men who use such solemn language and assume such a majestic attitude—presidents of sections and sub-committees, and authors of papers full of statistics, and certainly not open to the imputation of levity—should be on the side of feeling against law and

morals. They look far graver and more dull than Westminster Hall or the Court of Chancery itself. It cannot be that they are likely to think lightly of rights and duties. Strange, however, as it may appear, the fact is so. Such associations give to sensibility the advantage of gravity and weight, which it never had before, and justify its dictates in opposition to existing systems of law and morals. These gentlemen in their solemn way love mankind, and are thoroughly determined that men shall be happy in their way and in no other; nor does anything hamper them more than the common notions of individual rights. That men have a right, as they put it, to be dirty or ignorant—or, as it might be put, to prevent others from cleaning or teaching them against their will—is, in their eyes, nothing more than a relic of barbarism. They are willing to adopt any means that may be required to prevent such a state of things. They had far rather beat a boy into a jelly than allow him to be ignorant if he was obstinately determined on being so. That such a little wretch could have any rights at all appears hardly to enter into their minds. Indeed, they scarcely ever admit the rights of people of whom they disapprove. The parental rights of a careless parent, the conjugal rights of a bad husband, the proprietary rights of an unphilanthropic landlord, the political rights of an ignorant man—all these offend and disgust them, and, if they had their way, would not be worth a year's purchase. In course of time they would evolve a system of law and morals of their own, and mankind would then have an opportunity of testing the humanity of their tender mercies.

As sensibility is the motive power without which law and morals would be dry and dead, so law and morals are the great regulators of sensibility; and there never was, in any age of the world, a more urgent necessity than exists at present for the constant recognition of justice in human affairs, and for the prosecution of those studies which enable people to recognize its beauty and necessity, and especially its power to regulate the dictates of a sensibility capable, if neglected, of becoming positively ferocious.

October 6, 1860.

XXIII.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE MORALS.

THE most careless observer of the events at present passing in Europe can hardly have failed to observe that they give rise to an extraordinary number of moral problems of the most curious kind. The questions raised by the Thirty Years' War suggested to Grotius the composition of the book which has exercised over one of the most important departments of human affairs a greater degree of influence than almost any other human composition. If the present generation does not produce another treatise on the laws of nations, at least equal in interest and importance, it will be for want of a Grotius to write it, and not for want of circumstances to suggest it. If we make the effort necessary to rise above mere party and national views, and try in good faith to consider the different questions raised by the recent history of France, Germany, and Italy, we shall find that most of the current phrases by the help of which we usually talk and write upon such subjects are so inadequate that we stand in need of an entirely new set of theories upon some of the most important of the relations in which men stand to each other. What are we to say of the *coup d'état* of December,

1851? Was it, in perfect strictness of language, lying, conspiracy, and murder, or was it something else for which we have no definite name—and, if so, what ought it to be called? Was the crime of Orsini a murder in the same sense in which it is murder for a burglar to cut a man's throat for the sake of robbing him? Were the Austrians wrong when they invaded Piedmont, or the Piedmontese when they provoked them to do so, or the French when they crossed the Alps, or Garibaldi when he invaded Sicily, or Victor Emmanuel when he invaded the Papal States?—and, if so, who committed what offence, and why? We usually answer these questions according to our prejudices. We in England do not stand upon trifles when the object in view is the liberation of Italy from such a dynasty as that of the Neapolitan Bourbons. If Garibaldi or Count Cavour takes liberties with what is called international law, we utter a faint reproof, but substantially applaud and admire. On the other hand, no words are too hard for those who break through the very same rules in the very same way on the other side of the question. We praise the *colluvies gentium* who follow Garibaldi, but we stigmatize the foreign troops of the Pope by every means in our power. Perhaps this is not to be avoided in our present state of knowledge. Politically speaking this is an age of persecution. We have not yet learned to agree to differ upon international as we have upon theological questions; and, accordingly, we call actions done on our own side venial outbreaks of a generous enthusiasm, which, if they were done on the other side, we should stigmatize as atrocious violations of the most

sacred principles of international law and eternal justice. To solve the questions thus raised would require the composition of a second treatise *De Jure Belli et Pacis*, founded upon the principles which the current events have brought into notice since the time of Grotius. A few observations may be made in this place as to the sort of considerations with which the author of such a book would have to deal.

All our common language about public events is the language of private morality. Several of the weaknesses of the English mind are flattered by the assertion, that to send out into the streets of a peaceful town a party of men dressed in uniform, with muskets and bayonets in their hands, and with orders to kill and plunder, is just as much murder and robbery as to break into a house with half-a-dozen companions out of uniform, and do the same things. There is a sham sturdiness, and an analogy to some useful and characteristic peculiarities of English law, about such language, which, to the average English mind, is very attractive. It is, however, altogether fallacious. Murder and robbery are technical words, and presume a settled state of society affording security to life and property. This is true of almost all the words which are employed to stigmatize particular acts. They all depend upon, and flow from, the private relations of life, and will be found to refer almost entirely to four or five great classes of rights and duties, such as personal rights, the rights of property, rights arising out of the relation of marriage, and the rights and duties which exist between States and their subjects. Almost all the common phrases of morality depend upon, and flow

from, these rights. The second table of the Ten Commandments gives the best summary of them. Honour thy father and thy mother; thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not bear false witness; thou shalt not covet. Each of these commandments, and the rights and duties which spring from it, assume a settled state of society. Perhaps, the two broadest and most conspicuous are, Thou shalt not kill, and Thou shalt not steal; in other words, you shall respect your neighbour's life and property. Unless he were a member of some society, a man could not possess property; and if he were a mere solitary unit, unrelated to any other existing being, it cannot be said that it would be murder, in the proper sense of the word, for any other equally isolated being to kill him. We have no name for such an act, for all our language about human affairs proceeds upon an entirely different set of conceptions. We mean by murder the wilful, deliberate killing without just cause, and without certain specified excuses, of a man who comes under the protection of our municipal laws; and in all that is said about the atrocity of murder, there is a tacit reference to this state of things. The general doctrine as to both murder and theft may be said to be that, in the normal state of society, people ought—that is, it is highly expedient for them—to guarantee to each other the enjoyment of life and property against the attacks to which private passions usually expose them. This is the common settled course of human societies, and these are the principles which are applied to human affairs in an enormous majority of the cases which arise. In

respect, however, to international relations, a different set of principles must be taken into account. In international affairs individuals, no doubt, act and suffer. Men risk, and sometimes lose, their lives, their liberties, and the whole or part of their fortune, in wars and civil commotions, but the motives which induce them to inflict or suffer loss are not individual. It is by no means the same thing whether a man is plundered and wounded by burglars or by the soldiers of an absolute king who is trying to sustain his authority. The sack of Perugia shocked the sensibilities of a great part of Europe, but if the Pope had privately poisoned one of his friends or servants from any purely personal motive, even the blindest religious zeal would have denounced him as a criminal unfit to live. A man must be a very bitter Liberal indeed who really maintains that the violation by a Sovereign of his promissory oath of office stands precisely on the same footing as deliberate perjury in an ordinary court of justice. The common sentiment of the world recognizes a deep though ill-defined difference between these two classes of acts, and the sentiment may be justified on the ground that public and private morality are, and will probably long continue to be, in a totally different condition.

Private morality has been reduced to system in every human society; and though there is a considerable degree of difference between the morality of different ages and nations, there is a sufficient degree of resemblance between them to enable people living in different ages of the world, and in countries very remote from each other, to pass a decisive, and, on the whole, not an unjust judgment on each other's

conduct. Public morality, on the other hand, has not yet passed beyond the stage of sentiment. When we hear that diplomatists habitually say one thing and mean another ; that absolute kings massacre their subjects ; that mobs plunder, burn, and destroy ; that men who have no concern at all in the affairs of particular nations, let themselves out from mere cupidity as mercenary soldiers to enforce the commands of rulers to whom they owe no allegiance, we receive the same sort of shock, and feel the same kind of disapproving sentiment, as is excited by the news of an ordinary falsehood, murder, or robbery in private life. The difference between the two cases is, that with regard to private wrongs we do not stop at mere sentiment. We say of a lie, for example, that it is a perjury, a malignant slander, a simple untruth, little more than a joke, a mere exaggeration, or a conventional phrase, as the case may be ; and for certain purposes—especially for legal purposes—we classify particular acts with extraordinary minuteness. For example, a purse containing 10*l.* is stolen. If it was dropped on the floor of a railway carriage, the offence is simple larceny. If it was in a man's pocket, it was stealing from the person. If in his house, it was stealing above the value of 5*l.* in a dwelling-house. If the thief opened the house-door to get in, it was house-breaking ; if he did so after nine o'clock at night, and before six in the morning, it was burglary. Private morality, though not so precise as law, has still a considerable degree of precision ; but in public morality there is nothing in the least degree approaching to this. No one for the last two centuries has framed anything like a

theory of the rights and duties of sovereigns and subjects, or of the relations of nations to each other, sufficiently accurate to furnish anything approaching to an accurate classification of the different acts which they may perform towards each other. One or two phrases exist which indicate by their extreme vagueness the obscurity in which the subject is involved, whilst they point to the possibility of the attainment at some future time of greater clearness. "Revolution" and "*coup d'état*" are specimens. Most people would say that each is, under certain circumstances, justifiable; and that, when justifiable, each would justify a certain degree of violence, either to person, to property, or to previous engagements; but what are these circumstances, and what is the degree of violence which might justify and be justified? By answering these questions in a tolerably full and accurate manner, we should be able to turn into a system of morality what at present is a mere sentiment. In the meantime, we must confine ourselves to expressing our sentiments in the words which appear to embody them most nearly, and we must call people of whose acts we disapprove murderers, liars, and robbers, not because we really and fully mean what we say, but because no other words so nearly express our meaning.

December 24, 1860.

XXIV.

SECONDHAND KNOWLEDGE.

It has become a sort of fashion amongst an influential class of writers to depreciate the importance of all knowledge except that which is derived from a scrupulous and laborious study of the original sources of information upon particular subjects. Mr. Froude's well-known essay on the course of instruction given at Oxford, in which he recommended that students of English history should acquaint themselves minutely with portions of the Statute Book and other original authorities, instead of reading histories like Hume or Lingard, is as good an illustration of this fashion as any other. It is not difficult to understand, or, to some extent, to sympathize with, the feelings in which it originated; and, no doubt, when kept within proper limits, the suggestions which it prompts are wise. It is perfectly true that there is much more to be known upon any subject than any one book contains; and it is also true that, when a man writes the history of a country, he writes from the point of view and under the influence of the feelings of his own time and country, so that most histories fail to bring before the mind of the reader the real characteristics of the times and persons to

which they refer. All this, abundantly amplified and illustrated, has become commonplace; and it may be taken as true to this extent—that a profound study of any subject is likely to be more instructive and to be, in many respects, a better discipline for the mind, than a general acquaintance with it derived from summaries. A man could discipline his mind more effectually by studying the whole range of Greek literature than by reading Mr. Grote's *History of Greece*; and it may be true that the existing plan of studying the classics at the universities is better for the students than any plan for making them read, not the classics themselves, but books about them.

These considerations have been so much and so successfully dwelt upon of late years, that they have brought about several results which their authors probably did not foresee, and which are not in themselves desirable. There can be little doubt that they have contributed their full share to the growth of the pernicious habit which has so deeply infected several departments of literature, of dwelling upon details to an extent utterly disproportioned to their real importance. The notion that every detail which can be discovered respecting a dead man or a past generation must of necessity be instructive and important, is only a somewhat vulgar application of the principle that, in order to obtain any knowledge worth having, it is necessary to go back to original sources of information. From the fact that such sources usually abound in details, it is not very difficult for an inaccurate mind to infer that details share the dignity of original sources.

A more serious and more legitimate consequence of

the same theory is to be found in the tendency which it sometimes produces, and generally encourages, to feebleness and timidity of thought. The tendency of our generation to exaggerate the importance of young people, and to look upon particular mental processes as good for every one, because they have advantages in respect of education, is discussed elsewhere.* This habit of mind displays itself conspicuously in the slighting way in which it is customary to speak of the information to be obtained from summaries, such as histories or books which give the results of inquiry in any department of knowledge. A person who had not merely read, but had read carefully and with considerable intelligence, such a book as Blackstone's or Stephen's *Commentaries*, or works of a similar kind relating to medicine or to physical science, would be almost sure to be given to understand by professional lawyers, physicians, or scientific men, that his labour had been thrown away; and that, unless he gave up his whole time to studying the subject, he could never hope to be able to give an opinion upon any question relating to it.

In almost every department of thought, the process of the division of labour is being carried on so quickly that it seems by no means unlikely that we may at last arrive at a state of things in which the claim to any other sort of knowledge than a microscopic acquaintance with some particular department of some one branch will be regarded as an absurd presumption. It is difficult to imagine how calamitous this would be. The mere accumulation of knowledge in this form would have as little tendency to

* See *Essay XXI*, "Juniore Priore," p. 191.

elevate and enrich the minds of its possessors, or to produce any broad and permanent advantages to society at large, as the collection of a vast number of masons and bricklayers would have to raise a palace. The great subjects which always engage the attention and attract the interest of mankind at large, are those which concern them as human beings, and relate to their religious, political, or social condition. It is, happily, impossible to treat these subjects in a purely professional manner. It is not possible to frame rules by the observation of which any man may make sure of succeeding in political life. Before a man can be a statesman, in any elevated sense of the word, he must take into consideration a great variety of subjects. He must have a real grasp of the principles of law, of history, and of political economy. He must understand and be able to sympathize with the leading feelings of his countrymen, and he must have knowledge of the world and of mankind. It would be physically impossible that any man should acquire all this knowledge at first hand, and yet, if each part of his knowledge is worthless, the whole must be so also. But this is not, in fact, the case, and therefore secondhand knowledge is, in this instance, not merely an instrument, but an indispensable instrument, for fitting men for some of the most arduous and important duties which they can have to discharge.

Probably this would not be disputed in regard to practical life; but its application to speculation is not so generally admitted. There are many persons who appear to think that a man is not entitled to be heard upon any speculative subject, unless he has collected,

by original inquiries, all the materials of his speculation. They will say, for example, that no one can be allowed to give an opinion upon a metaphysical theory unless he has qualified himself by reading all the principal metaphysical books which have been written from the days of Plato downwards. If he has not done so, what he may say will be met, not by an answer, but by a reference to some theory of the Infinite which either is or is supposed to be opposed to him. You have no right, it is said, to have an opinion as to the doctrines of Sir W. Hamilton unless you have read all the books on which his opinions were founded or which they were meant to controvert. If, therefore, in pursuing inquiries upon other subjects, you find yourself involved in metaphysical difficulties, you must not presume to attempt to solve them, but must content yourself with collecting facts and observing similarities in your own particular department.

No language is better calculated to discourage all the higher efforts of the mind than this, and there can be little doubt that it is sometimes designedly employed for this purpose. There are men who try to dissuade others from going to secondhand sources of information, and to confine them to the investigation of original sources, because they hope by that means to prevent them from arriving at conclusions which they dislike or dread. If a man is suspected of wishing to obtain metaphysical opinions in order that he may apply them to theology, and if another fears that the result may be unfavourable to his orthodoxy, there is an obvious reason for insisting upon the importance of his acquainting himself with

all the theories of the Infinite that ever were written, instead of relying upon histories of philosophy, or other portable summaries. It will always be highly probable that long before the last theory of the Infinite is reached the inquirer will either have abandoned the subject in despair, or carried his doubts or his investigations to the next world.

In fact, no subject which relates to human affairs and human life can be investigated with any useful result, unless the premisses which support the conclusions ultimately reached are drawn from several different sources which no one mind can investigate from the bottom. It is this circumstance that gives their importance to histories and other works of the same kind. It is perfectly true that no summary, however exact and correct it may be, can put the reader on a level with the author; but it is equally true that no cultivated and intelligent man can read a really good book upon any subject with the general bearings of which he has some acquaintance, without deriving from it a great deal of knowledge and many reflections which he may use with confidence as the basis of further speculation. A man who had read with care Gibbon, Milman, Mosheim, and other works of the same kind, would have a very considerable knowledge of the circumstances under which Christianity has spread itself over great part of the world, and would be entitled to express a strong opinion as to the inferences which might be drawn from its history, although he had not explored all the original authorities upon the subject. Of course, great judgment is required in making use of such works. One principal difference in the way in which different

people read and think is, that one man delivers himself over bound, as it were, hand and foot to the authorities to which he resorts, whilst another exercises a discretion as to what he will and what he will not believe. This is true even in the simplest of all cases, where the object is to determine what degree of credit is to be attached to the direct evidence of eye-witnesses, but the difficulty of the task increases progressively as the judge recedes from the transaction itself. If it requires discretion to say what consequence is to be drawn from the fact, that B asserts that he saw A, it requires far more to determine what is the value of C's assertion that B said he saw A; and where C is an historian, B a large number of chroniclers, polemical divines, poets, and letter-writers, and A a complicated series of events, the difficulty reaches its highest point.

Still, though the difficulty is great, it is one which a judicious man will be able to overcome by the exercise of proper caution, and by carefully restricting the statements which he makes, and limiting the inferences which he draws; and it is encouraging to see how successfully this is accomplished in many of the books which have produced the greatest effect on mankind. Such books have seldom been written by men of profound special learning, but rather by persons who, having filled their minds with knowledge taken up at second-hand, have known how to make one subject bear upon another, and have so been able to draw novel and important conclusions from premisses furnished by the investigations of others in their special departments. Many instances of this might be taken. For the purpose of illustra-

tion, one or two will be sufficient. No one exercised a greater influence over his generation than Bentham. Yet no one was less entitled to the character of a man of great special learning. He was unquestionably possessed of wide information, and his information bore upon a variety of subjects; but the circumstance which gave him so much power over others was that, by seeing what it was that his information proved, and by reflecting boldly and vigorously on the principles of the subjects with which he concerned himself, he was able to elaborate clear theories, and to connect those theories closely and effectively with practical results. If he had eschewed secondhand knowledge and devoted his life to original investigations, he would have accomplished much less. Another instance is afforded by a writer of a very different character—Bishop Butler. The *Analogy*, though it bears the traces of a wonderful amount of thought, and of a certain sort of study, is not a learned book in the sense in which Gibbon's or Warburton's works are learned. It conveys the notion that its author had studied, and had weighed, with extraordinary patience, all the theories of his day which appeared to him to require an answer, and it is difficult to say what amount of reading may not have contributed to the fulness of mind which the book displays; but parts of it are obviously borrowed from the results of the inquiries of others—for example, the summary of the prophetic and historical evidences of Christianity in the second part.

Such instances as these—and many others might be added—prove that it is not the exclusive province of men of great special learning to instruct mankind;

and that when they do so, their labours result in something more valuable than the supply of casual reading to persons whose opinions are of little importance, or of indexes for future students like themselves. Their books are useful in many ways, but especially as materials for men whose strength lies in thinking rather than in reading, and in combining the conclusions of several branches of study rather than in minutely investigating any one.

December 1, 1860.

XXV.

SPIRIT-RAPPING.

THE success which spirit-rappers and their advocates have met with on both sides of the Atlantic is a remarkable circumstance. It has been often stated that in America, the believers are numbered by millions; and it is well-known that countrymen of our own, who from their education ought to know better, believe, with the most simple satisfaction, that Mr. Hume has relations with ghosts who employ themselves (invariably in darkened rooms) in making tables climb upon ottomans, in carrying Mr. Hume round the ceiling, in conveying the silliest of all remarks through the clumsiest of all machinery, and in doing a variety of other things equally impressive and sensible. It is almost a matter of regret that explanations of many of these juggling tricks should have been published by men who put sleight of hand to its legitimate purposes, as it is to be feared that the credit of spirit-rapping may thus be destroyed, and that the instructive illustrations of human credulity which result from it may be prematurely brought to a close. It is to be regretted that educated men and women should be relieved by indiscreet jugglers from the responsibility of saying

whether or no they are prepared to believe the stories told about Mr. Hume and his fellows upon the bare personal authority of those who tell them. There has been hardly any case in modern times in which the issue whether or not the evidence which would prove a murder will prove a miracle has been so neatly raised as in the case of spirit-rapping; and the interposition of persons who, by untimely explanations, enable the public to disbelieve the witnesses without discrediting them, is as unsatisfactory to speculative observers as the compromises which occasionally break out in cases involving curious points of law must always be to lawyers. As, however, a point of law may be argued upon a state of facts altogether imaginary, it may be interesting to consider what ought to have been, and what were in point of fact, the conclusions drawn by persons who read in the newspapers and elsewhere, or heard in private society, a variety of stories about rapping spirits, animated tables, and the like, wonderful enough to justify, upon the supposition of their truth, the use of such words as miraculous and supernatural; who did not hear or read of any natural mode of explaining such occurrences; and who had no other reason than the marvellous nature of the stories themselves for supposing that the persons who related them were not speaking the truth.

The first step which a reasonable person who heard or read such stories would take, would be to decide whether or not he meant to form an opinion about them. If he did not think it worth his while to do so—which would be the case with almost all men of sense who did not happen to be troubled with

a very large amount of superfluous leisure—he would simply amuse himself with the grotesqueness of the stories, and pay no further attention to them. For all ordinary purposes, it is safer, and generally wiser, to act the part of the Scribe and Pharisee towards strange stories. If a man is sometimes led by this habit into despising a new invention or remarkable discovery, he gets no harm and does no harm by it. Baron Alderson thought and said that it was absurd to suppose that locomotive engines could ever succeed; and his remark has been quoted by the idolaters of Mr. George Stephenson as an awful example. Yet he rose to be a judge, and sat on the bench for nearly thirty years. If he had believed in railways from the first, he would probably not have done much more. There can be little doubt that the same habit of mind led him to despise many other schemes which turned out ill, and probably, on the whole, it did as little harm to him as to the railways.

If a man desired to go a little deeper into the matter, he would probably consider to what class of subjects the alleged discoveries belonged. A man of reasonably good education, especially if he has ever studied any branch of any scientific subject with any approach to accuracy, ought to have a fair notion of the kind of certainty attainable in different branches of knowledge, and of the general nature of the proofs by which the propositions which belong to them are supported. He would, for example, see at once that no one could pretend to say with confidence whether or not the stars are inhabited; nor would he pay much attention to any one, however eminent or learned, who pronounced a decisive opinion on the

subject; but he would listen respectfully to any man of established scientific reputation who told him that he had discovered a mode of foretelling the general character of next year's weather. The reason of this distinction is, that it is matter of general notoriety that the nature of life is a great riddle, and that no one knows all the conditions under which it may exist, but something is already known about the currents of the air, and the variations of heat and cold, and many discoveries may be expected to be made about them by the careful observation of well-known phenomena. Applying this principle, it would be reasonable to say, Spirit-rapping belongs to a set of subjects which have always been discredited, and respecting which no discovery has ever been made. It is related to witchcraft, apparitions, and other nests of imposture, and therefore is not to be believed.

These, however, are mere general observations. If a man determined to form as sound an opinion on the subject as could be reached, he would have to examine the evidence itself, and to see what really was proved and what was not, and in this process the first and one of the most important steps would be to separate the facts stated from the inferences drawn from them. The only facts of which there is any evidence at all is that certain people saw and heard certain things. That those appearances and sounds were produced by spirits is an inference not capable of direct proof, and hardly capable of indirect proof. Certain raps are heard, which, when compared with alphabets, spell out the assertion that a dead man is saying such and such things. Suppose the experiment were repeated any number

of times and under all varieties of circumstances, would this prove that in fact the dead man was making these assertions? Unless we had some independent knowledge of dead men and their modes of action, it would not prove, or tend to prove, anything of the sort. As we know nothing whatever about dead men, it would be quite as reasonable to found upon the fact, supposing it to be proved, any other inference whatever; for example, that the sounds were produced by an archangel, by the devil, by devils and angels jointly, by a wild beast in the planet Saturn, or by any other cause in heaven, earth, or elsewhere. All that can be inferred from any effect is the antecedence of a cause; our only knowledge of causation is derived from experience: and if rappings and table-twisting form a class of effects altogether peculiar and unrelated to any others, they may, for aught we know to the contrary, be caused by anything, conceivable or inconceivable. We mean by causation nothing more than invariable sequence, and how can we possibly know what is the invariable antecedent of effects which, as far as our powers of tracing go, are by the hypothesis ultimate phenomena?

The course of a person who inquired reasonably, and on true principles, into the subject of rapping spirits would thus be barred at a very early period of his inquiry by an insuperable obstacle. He would never be able to get beyond the facts that certain noises were heard, and certain appearances seen, and that certain motions took place in inanimate matter on occasions when nothing which could account for them on common and recognized principles was

present. Unless he had the opportunity of making personal investigations, he would have to be contented with the fact that particular people said that this was so; and it is an extremely curious question whether a wise man would or would not believe them, if, after their stories had been carefully sifted and their means of knowledge had been ascertained to be sufficient, it appeared that they really did say so. It is of course possible to imagine cases in which he would. If the assertion was found to be made by a great many people independently of each other, and under circumstances which made collusion, or even communication, impossible or extremely difficult, the accumulation of evidence might no doubt be sufficient to remove all possibility of doubt; but if upon inquiry the number of first-hand witnesses was reduced to two or three credible persons, unanimously affirming facts otherwise unexampled, a very curious question would arise—the question, namely, as to the absolute value of human testimony. It is impossible to give a complete and definite answer to this question. The effect of the testimony of three sane and credible witnesses, who should unanimously affirm, under the most awful sanctions, and after being subjected to severe tests of accuracy, that they saw the poker and shovel walk arm-in-arm to the middle of a given drawing-room, and there heard them preach a sermon on the ninth commandment, is just as much a question of experience as the question whether a man could be found able to lift a ton and a half.

Experience appears to show that such a story would be believed by many persons. When a single

anonymous individual wrote a letter to the *Times* some years ago to say that he had seen a whole set of murders of the most frightful kind committed in a railway-train in Georgia, people not only believed him, but the *Times* published a leading article on the atrocity of the event. It so happened that his story was open to contradiction on a number of points, and was, in fact, contradicted and overthrown; but it was not disbelieved on the ground that the event was so extraordinary that the evidence of a single witness must be considered insufficient to prove it. If the scene had been laid in a place where contradiction was out of the question—as, for example, on the deck of a wrecked ship—no one would have doubted it, and the tale would have been received as a striking example of the atrocities into which human nature is capable of being betrayed in its extremities. The common case of criminal trials is perhaps a stronger instance of the extraordinary confidence which people place in each other's uncorroborated assertions. Juries will convict men of crimes of the most fearful kind upon the bare statement of a single witness, of whom they know next to nothing, that he saw the crime committed. A tenth part of the evidence offered in support of the miracles said to be worked by Mr. Hume would have been more than sufficient to stamp men with infamy, and to send them to penal servitude for life. Every one who has had much experience of juries knows the fatal weight of a direct and positive oath. No general considerations will prevail against it; and juries owe their authority, and indeed their very existence, to the fact that they represent common

sense and common experience ; so that the readiness with which they believe sworn testimony, however serious the consequences of giving credit to it may be, must be considered as a fair specimen of the feelings of mankind at large.

These observations apply to the question of the value which ought to be attached to direct evidence in favour of improbable occurrences given by men of sense, desirous of arriving at the truth, and taking pains to do so ; but the eagerness with which people have received the doctrines of spirit-rapping, and the utter neglect which they have shown of the various steps indicated above towards the formation of a sound judgment, throw light on another point of considerable interest. They show that a large proportion, even of educated people are altogether destitute of anything approaching to scientific habits of mind or of thought, and that they have not the least notion of the bearings or value of evidence. They never seem to draw the distinction between a fact and an inference ; nor do they ever recognize the rule that, if more causes than one may account for a particular state of facts, its existence cannot be said to prove, however, any one of them.

The popularity of spirit-rapping shows something more than the rarity of strict or accurate habits of thought. It shows how wide is the prevalence of gross, downright credulity. The fact that a large number of people believe the assertions of unknown writers that they have seen tables climb upon ottomans, and have heard ghosts playing on the piano, is very memorable. It sets the value of popular belief upon any subject which falls a little out of the common

routine in a 'striking light, and it proves how very little the great majority even of intelligent men and women are in the habit of watching the operations of their own minds, and of regulating the formation of their opinions by anything deserving the name of a principle. Many of the causes of this state of things are constant, and exist in all times and all states of society, but others are peculiar to our own time and country. One of the most curious of them is the spread of mechanical invention. It might have been supposed that a scientific age would be, of all ages, the least superstitious; and if a scientific age meant an age in which all or many minds were scientifically trained, this might, though it is far from certain that it would, be true. In point of fact, the phrase is generally employed to describe an age in which the results and applications of science attain unusual importance; and such a state of things is not only not a hindrance to superstition, but has a direct tendency to promote it. People fall down and worship the work of their neighbours' hands—steam engines, electric telegraphs, and printing presses. They are so impressed by the wonders produced by these and other machines, that they get to look upon science as a sort of god—a blind, arbitrary, capricious deity, who may perform, at any moment, any strange unreasonable prodigy. They are so overcome by electric telegraphs, that they have no objection to urge against rapping spirits. If an American can speak to you from the other side of the Atlantic, why may not a friend speak to you from the other side of the grave? The following anecdote typifies the weaknesses of a higher class of society than that

to which its hero belonged :—A Lincolnshire boor was visited, when *in extremis*, by the vicar of the parish, who administered to him appropriate spiritual advice with more energy than success. After much ineffectual admonition, the dying man replied to the following effect, in a feeble voice, and a dialect which cannot be reproduced on paper :—“ What with faith, and what with the earth a-turning round the sun, and what with the railroads a-fuzzing and a-whuzzing, I’m clean stonied, muddled, and beat.” These were his last words. They sum up with great emphasis the intellectual results of scientific discovery on a great part of mankind.

December 22, 1860.

XXV.

SPIRIT-RAPPING.

THE success which spirit-rappers and their advocates have met with on both sides of the Atlantic is a remarkable circumstance. It has been often stated that in America, the believers are numbered by millions; and it is well-known that countrymen of our own, who from their education ought to know better, believe, with the most simple satisfaction, that Mr. Hume has relations with ghosts who employ themselves (invariably in darkened rooms) in making tables climb upon ottomans, in carrying Mr. Hume round the ceiling, in conveying the silliest of all remarks through the clumsiest of all machinery, and in doing a variety of other things equally impressive and sensible. It is almost a matter of regret that explanations of many of these juggling tricks should have been published by men who put sleight of hand to its legitimate purposes, as it is to be feared that the credit of spirit-rapping may thus be destroyed, and that the instructive illustrations of human credulity which result from it may be prematurely brought to a close. It is to be regretted that educated men and women should be relieved by indiscreet jugglers from the responsibility of saying

sons exercise? And what are the prospects which their career holds out?

No man can exercise the sort of influence under consideration without an uncommon combination of qualities; and though such persons occasionally appear for a time, at least, to exert an extraordinary influence over the age in which they live, the qualities which enable them to do so are by no means of the highest kind. One qualification which is altogether indispensable in such a man is, that he should be keenly alive to the intellectual, and still more to the moral, difficulties which the circumstances of the time present to the minds of sensitive and not unthoughtful youths. It is also indispensable that he should be supplied with a fund of enthusiastic and positive language which either contains or suggests a solution of them. The fulfilment of each of these conditions is inexorably required of every one who wishes to be regarded as an evangelist—a bearer of good news—by the young and enthusiastic. He must be able to draw out into clear and bold relief the difficulties of which they were already obscurely conscious; to hold up to them something positive to believe; and to throw that something into such a shape as to promise a solution of the difficulties. The personal gifts which such a power implies, and which are almost universally found in those who possess it, are quick sympathy, a tender conscience, courage, generosity, ingenuity, and eloquence. A man who unites in himself these qualities, and exercises them in the direction in question, is almost sure to be, if he pleases, the founder of a school of able and enthusiastic youths, who will

almost worship him, receive his opinions as a revelation, and display, probably, for the rest of their lives, traces of the influence which he has had over them.

There are, however, other gifts, with the entire absence of which such powers are quite consistent. The founder of such a school may be one-sided, wrong-headed, narrow-minded, and obscure to any extent. If he succeeds in deceiving himself, and is personally honourable and truthful, he may be as uncandid as he pleases, and may be so incapable of seeing that there is more than one side to a question, that he may, from the best of motives, commit the most outrageous injustice. Depth and capacity of mind, and the habitual dryness and caution which expect, and at last attain, qualified and possibly intricate conclusions, are far from being attractive to the young. Wesley and Whitefield had crowds of enthusiastic disciples, but what youth would ever have thought of worshipping Butler?

It is a doubtful question whether it is or is not an advantage to a man to have been brought, in early youth, under the influence of persons of this character. At first sight, nothing appears more desirable. The influence which such a man acquires, and the effect which he produces, are almost electrical. Youths who were either indifferent to their teachers or dissatisfied with their lessons, become only too zealous; problems which before had distressed and baffled them melt into thin air; and they are prepared to go out at once and evangelize the world—social, political, or religious, as the case may be—upon the principles which they suppose themselves to

have mastered. If there is much that is silly, there is something that is amiable and even respectable in this kind of enthusiasm. Men whose passions are much stronger than their understandings may retain it for many years, but with the great mass it is but a transient phase. As the pupils grow older and study their master's creed more carefully, they soon find out that it is one-sided, incomplete, often inconsistent, and almost always at variance with facts. If they are cool enough to speculate with anything approaching to fairness upon their own mental history, they are nearly sure to find that what really attracted them in it was the crudeness and confidence with which it asserted that some set of new-fashioned phrases contained a real solution of difficulties which have perplexed men for centuries, and which, if conquerable at all, will yield only to tedious sapping and mining, while they continue to set open assaults at defiance. Such a discovery as this, however gradually it may be made, is a great blow to a man's mental health. Few men have sufficient candour and courage to make a full confession in mature life of the mistakes of their youth, and to undertake the labour of forming for themselves a durable and substantial creed. Indeed, if they have the inclination, they have generally lost the opportunity. They have proceeded so far on the voyage that it is not worth while to put back for the sake of testing the compass. Hence they fall into a state of orthodox scepticism. They cling to the principles which delighted their youth, though they know that they are hollow; and they refuse to give way to the difficulties which they once thought they had solved,

although they know the hollowness of the solution. Natural energy, and the impatience of being left behind by the rest of the world, sometimes induce such men to continue to take a part—often ostentatiously prominent and noisy—in controversies connected with the subjects which gained their attention in youth; but the spirit in which they do so is a strange contrast to that which animated them in earlier life. The warmth and the eagerness are still there, but the fuel is all burnt away. They are as violent as ever, but their object is to attain some minute party object, to humiliate some personal antagonist, or to forward some crotchet which they value because it is remotely connected with the principles which they once believed. There are few more melancholy spectacles than that of a man who twenty years ago believed that he and his teachers possessed the secret by which the Church and the world were to be reconciled and reformed, and who is now consuming his energies in disingenuous efforts to injure some one who has travelled by a different road from himself, and who holds opinions which he still dislikes, though he no longer really believes it possible to refute or establish either them or any others.

The teacher himself not unfrequently lives to afford a spectacle hardly less melancholy than the scholars. When the generation in which he lives has made that indefinable but inevitable step which distinguishes the present from the past, and has brought into prominence a slightly different set of questions, and a slightly different way of treating them from that to which he was accustomed, his disciples become less

numerous, less enthusiastic, and very much less able. He comes to the end of the tunes which he has to play, and generally goes on playing them over and over again with feebler and feebler variations, attracting a scantier audience by each successive performance. This is more especially the case with writers. Leaders of parties, social or religious, are subject to different trials. Sometimes they outrun their disciples, and with a courage which is neither imitated nor admired, leap into some creed where few follow them, and where their own importance is entirely destroyed. This has been the fate of the ardent and generous men who made the journey from Oxford to Rome. Who listens to them now? Whom do they influence? The noisy bigots who lie, and curse, and bully in Irish newspapers have a much wider sphere of influence than the man of genius who five-and-twenty years ago was worshipped at Oxford with ardent enthusiasm by hundreds of enthusiastic youths who are now middle-aged clergymen, lawyers, and country gentlemen, as little influenced by the name of Dr. Newman as by that of Dr. Achilli. Sometimes, on the other hand, the disciples outrun the master, the ducklings take to the water, and their foster-parent stands behind on the bank, a not uninteresting but not a dignified spectacle.

Such reflections as these point to the conclusion, in favour of which many independent arguments might be urged, that it is unwise for a man who cares for the investigation of truth to address himself to the young, or to address his own contemporaries in a manner which will attract young hearers to the controversy. To make any considerable change in the

opinions or in the institutions of the world is one of the most serious enterprizes which a man can take in hand. The legitimate mode of carrying out such enterprizes is quiet, gradual investigation, and the calm expression of mature and qualified opinions. This is the task, not of a few years, but of a lifetime; and all the experience which can be derived from other pursuits may be brought to bear upon it. A man so employed need never fear that he will confuse the minds and vitiate the sentiments of his disciples; for he will have no disciples but those who are entitled to be considered as fellow-students; nor need he fear to figure before the world as a burnt-out firework, for the light (if any) which he diffuses will be dry light, uncoloured by personal ingredients. After saying what he has to say, he may be silent without disappointing expectation, and may be alone without being deserted.

There are few stronger proofs of the degree in which passion predominates over reason than the unpopularity of such advice as this. It would seem as if the instinct which leads speculative men to seek to propagate their opinions were as powerful in its way as that which leads most men to wish to leave behind them physical descendants; and each instinct, powerful as it is, is in some respects unaccountable. Many persons who know well the uncertainty of all opinions, the strange way in which even true opinions are entangled with every kind of error, and in which, as experience increases and facts accumulate, what was true for one age seems to become false for another, are nevertheless intensely anxious that as many people as possible should think as they think

on the subjects in which they are interested. This is in its way as great a mystery as that men who know how questionable a benefit life is, and how it is hemmed in on every side with mysteries insoluble or appalling, should be pleased to think that after they have gone they know not whither, others should bear their name in the same confused scene, and follow their footsteps on the same unknown path. Experience appears to prove that, constituted as we are, all the troubles of this world and all the terrors of the next act in most cases less powerfully than the suggestions of good health and a sanguine temper.

February 9, 1861.

XXVII.

MR. CARLYLE.

Few of the cheap reprints of the books of popular authors, which have of late become so common, will attract more attention or enjoy greater popularity than the collected edition of Mr. Carlyle's writings. With those who admire him most, he enjoys a reputation which is almost mystical. To numberless young and ardent readers, his writings have come as the announcement of a new gospel, nor can any one read them without a deep interest in the books, and a sincere feeling of respect for the author. Perhaps all books may be ranged under two heads—those which assume, and those which seek to establish, principles : and if the former are both more interesting and more practically important than the latter, after a certain early period of life, it cannot be denied that the influence of the latter, acting at the most susceptible and impressible age, is both wider and deeper. The great peculiarity of Mr. Carlyle's books is that it is his ambition in every case to go to the heart of the matter—to set before his reader what is vital and essential, and to leave on one side the mere husks and shells of history, biography, politics, theology, or criticism. The object is a common one

with men of any real artistic power, but no one ever effected it so completely. Mr. Carlyle has hardly ever written a page on any subject, however insignificant, which does not bear the stamp of his own character in a manner almost unexampled. He has spent his life in a protest against the Dryasdusts of politics and of literature. If people like information worked up into a vivid picture of the fact as Mr. Carlyle saw it, or a vehement set of consequences drawn therefrom, they will nowhere else find anything so vivid. His career and present position embody more fully than those of any other man the especial advantages and disadvantages of the literary temperament—the turn of mind which leads its possessors to sit on a hill retired and make remark upon men and things instead of taking part in the common affairs of life. Mr. Carlyle, no doubt, has a warm interest in the race to which he belongs in all the phases of its existence; but he is emphatically a preacher, and not an actor, to many of his readers, far the most popular preacher known to this generation. His performances may be looked upon from two points of view, one of which regards their artistic and the other their dogmatic value.

Regarded as works of art, the best of Mr. Carlyle's writings may be put at the very head of contemporary literature. It is impossible to mention any modern book which can for an instant be compared, in some of the highest literary excellencies, to his *History of the French Revolution*. It gives a series of pictures and portraits so distinct, and so life-like, that they make it almost impossible to remember the scenes which they describe through any other medium. To

many of its readers no other Robespierre will ever, as Mr. Carlyle himself would say, be possible, than the Robespierre who seemed to him "the meanest" of all the deputies of the Tiers Etat:—

"That anxious, slight, ineffectual-looking man, under thirty, in spectacles. His eyes (were the glasses off) troubled, careful; with upturned face snuffing dimly the uncertain future times; complexion of a multiplex atrabiliar colour, the final shade of which may be the pale sea-green. . . . A strict-minded, strait-laced man . . . whose small soul, transparent, wholesome-looking as small ale, could by no chance ferment into virulent *alegar*, the mother of ever new *alegar*, till all France were grown acetous-virulent?"

Such sentences give the impression that there is nothing more to be said on the subject. Reams of description would only weaken them; and it would be impossible for any one who had once sincerely relished and appreciated the picture which they draw to form any other satisfactory notion of the person whom they describe. The same might be said of every chapter, and almost every page, of this extraordinary book. With hardly any argument or reflection, it gives, by mere force of style, at once a picture and a theory of the French Revolution. The ages of misgovernment and corruption which laid the train, the heap of gunpowder on which the spark fell, and the final explosion, are described with just enough detail to be characteristic, and just enough generality to mark the vastness of the event. No one but a man of real and great genius could have done this. The tone in which the book is written is perhaps the

most wonderful and characteristic part of it. Without levity, and without bitterness, the grotesque and somewhat contemptible aspect of the whole business is brought out with wonderful force. No such tragicomedies are to be found in the language as the accounts of the flight to Varennes, the insurrection of the women, and the innumerable takings of oaths, feasts of Reason, feast of the Supreme Being, and the other fooleries in which the silliest, if not the worst, features of French national character expressed themselves.

The book is not less remarkable as a portrait than as a picture gallery. It illustrates perhaps even better than the lectures on Hero-Worship the method by which Mr. Carlyle proceeds in estimating character. He forms to himself a conception of the man as a living whole. He tries, to use the old scholastic phrase, to see, not his qualities, but his quiddity, and he seldom fails to put before his readers a picture far more vivid than any drawn by novelists or poets. A good illustration of this may be found in a comparison of the Cagliostro of Mr. Carlyle with the Joseph Balsamo of the *Mémoires d'un Médecin*. Mr. Carlyle's conception is as much superior in art, in possibility, in life, and spirit, to M. Dumas', as Sir Walter Scott's Puritans are superior to the absurd caricature of Felton, which is introduced into the *Vingt Ans Après*. The same praise must be bestowed on nearly every portrait which Mr. Carlyle has drawn. The genius with which he has, as it were, evolved Cromwell from his speeches and correspondence is admirable, and it is not too much to say that his book on the subject has given the first

example of a species of biography which in intrinsic value is superior to any other yet discovered. The moral tone of Mr. Carlyle's biographies enlists his readers' sympathy as much as their intellectual excellences excite their admiration. Nothing in the main can be kinder, gentler, or more honest, than the spirit in which he judges even those whom he least likes. The worst of men are not described without a touch of sympathy. Louis XV. and Philippe Egalité themselves are condemned with an appreciation of their peculiar temptations, and nothing can exceed the fairness with which any redeeming point in conduct, or even in speech, is recognized and insisted on. No one can have studied Mr. Carlyle's writings without feeling a strong personal liking for him. If he is the most indignant and least cheerful of living writers, he is also one of the wittiest and the most humane.

When we turn from the artistic to the dogmatic point of view, our admiration of Mr. Carlyle's genius is greatly modified. That he has done some good, and even considerable good, may be admitted; but he has done it almost entirely by the vigorous manner in which he has preached doctrines in the truth of which all the world agree with him, whilst such of his views as are peculiar to himself are, for the most part, false and mischievous, not only in respect of their substance, but also in respect of the style in which they are brought forward. A large proportion of his most effective writings consists almost entirely of the inculcation of duties and virtues which have always been acknowledged as such; and with respect to which he can claim no higher

merit than that of recognizing at first hand, and in an original manner, the fact that they are virtues. His vehement praises of truth, of fact, of earnestness—his doctrine that work is worship—and his denunciation of cant, of semblances, and of shams, is only an amplification of those clauses in the catechism which say that our duty to our neighbour enjoins us, amongst other things, to be true and just in all our dealings, to learn and labour truly to get our own living, and to do our duty in the state of life to which it has pleased God to call us. Mr. Carlyle is certainly entitled to the praise of having preached on a very old subject in such a manner as to arrest the attention of his congregation and to keep them wide awake, but it does not follow that he has, as so many people seem to think, made any wonderful discoveries in morality.

This recognition of Mr. Carlyle's genius, and the admission of the fact that he has done good service to society by the vigour with which he has preached all the cardinal virtues, is consistent with the belief that much of what he has written is open to grave objections. Throughout the whole of his writings he is constantly struggling to get below what is merely formal and external, and to reach the substance and, so to speak, the soul of things. To use a phrase of his own, he dwells upon the virtualities as opposed to the actualities. He does not care to know what technical description a moralist would give to the acts of Danton or Robespierre, or how he would describe the massacres of September. He inquires into the essence of men and things. Danton was a wild Titan, Robespierre a "sea-green

although they know the hollowness of the solution. Natural energy, and the impatience of being left behind by the rest of the world, sometimes induce such men to continue to take a part—often ostentatiously prominent and noisy—in controversies connected with the subjects which gained their attention in youth; but the spirit in which they do so is a strange contrast to that which animated them in earlier life. The warmth and the eagerness are still there, but the fuel is all burnt away. They are as violent as ever, but their object is to attain some minute party object, to humiliate some personal antagonist, or to forward some crotchet which they value because it is remotely connected with the principles which they once believed. There are few more melancholy spectacles than that of a man who twenty years ago believed that he and his teachers possessed the secret by which the Church and the world were to be reconciled and reformed, and who is now consuming his energies in disingenuous efforts to injure some one who has travelled by a different road from himself, and who holds opinions which he still dislikes, though he no longer really believes it possible to refute or establish either them or any others.

The teacher himself not unfrequently lives to afford a spectacle hardly less melancholy than the scholars. When the generation in which he lives has made that indefinable but inevitable step which distinguishes the present from the past, and has brought into prominence a slightly different set of questions, and a different way of treating them from that to which he was accustomed, his disciples become less

numerous, less enthusiastic, and very much less able. He comes to the end of the tunes which he has to play, and generally goes on playing them over and over again with feebler and feebler variations, attracting a scantier audience by each successive performance. This is more especially the case with writers. Leaders of parties, social or religious, are subject to different trials. Sometimes they outrun their disciples, and with a courage which is neither imitated nor admired, leap into some creed where few follow them, and where their own importance is entirely destroyed. This has been the fate of the ardent and generous men who made the journey from Oxford to Rome. Who listens to them now? Whom do they influence? The noisy bigots who lie, and curse, and bully in Irish newspapers have a much wider sphere of influence than the man of genius who five-and-twenty years ago was worshipped at Oxford with ardent enthusiasm by hundreds of enthusiastic youths who are now middle-aged clergymen, lawyers, and country gentlemen, as little influenced by the name of Dr. Newman as by that of Dr. Achilli. Sometimes, on the other hand, the disciples outrun the master, the ducklings take to the water, and their foster-parent stands behind on the bank, a not uninteresting but not a dignified spectacle.

Such reflections as these point to the conclusion, in favour of which many independent arguments might be urged, that it is unwise for a man who cares for the investigation of truth to address himself to the young, or to address his own contemporaries in a manner which will attract young hearers to the controversy. To make any considerable change in the

opinions or in the institutions of the world is one of the most serious enterprizes which a man can take in hand. The legitimate mode of carrying out such enterprizes is quiet, gradual investigation, and the calm expression of mature and qualified opinions. This is the task, not of a few years, but of a life-time; and all the experience which can be derived from other pursuits may be brought to bear upon it. A man so employed need never fear that he will confuse the minds and vitiate the sentiments of his disciples; for he will have no disciples but those who are entitled to be considered as fellow-students; nor need he fear to figure before the world as a burnt-out firework, for the light (if any) which he diffuses will be dry light, uncoloured by personal ingredients. After saying what he has to say, he may be silent without disappointing expectation, and may be alone without being deserted.

There are few stronger proofs of the degree in which passion predominates over reason than the unpopularity of such advice as this. It would seem as if the instinct which leads speculative men to seek to propagate their opinions were as powerful in its way as that which leads most men to wish to leave behind them physical descendants; and each instinct, powerful as it is, is in some respects unaccountable. Many persons who know well the uncertainty of all opinions, the strange way in which even true opinions are entangled with every kind of error, and in which, as experience increases and facts accumulate, what was true for one age seems to become false for another, are nevertheless intensely anxious that as many people as possible should think as they think



on the subjects in which they are interested. This is in its way as great a mystery as that men who know how questionable a benefit life is, and how it is hemmed in on every side with mysteries insoluble or appalling, should be pleased to think that after they have gone they know not whither, others should bear their name in the same confused scene, and follow their footsteps on the same unknown path. Experience appears to prove that, constituted as we are, all the troubles of this world and all the terrors of the next act in most cases less powerfully than the suggestions of good health and a sanguine temper.

February 9, 1861.

you have the old heroic ages." The moral, as to the baseness of the one state of things and the healthiness of the other, follows as of course. The skill of the representation completely blinds ordinary readers to the fact that its truth and adequacy, not its ingenuity, are the real points at issue. Apart from their picturesqueness, these books are a strange mixture of poverty and audacity. An Irish widow dies of fever at Glasgow, and infects some sixteen or seventeen others, who die too; but such a thing could not have happened in the middle ages. "No human creature then went about connected with nobody . . . reduced to prove his relationship by dying of typhus fever." It would be interesting to know what "the harpy Jews," whom Abbot Samson "banished bag and baggage out of the banlieue of St. Edmondsbury," thought about their connections; nor would it be undesirable to learn how many people proved their relationship by dying of infection in the great plague of 1347, which destroyed nearly 60,000 people in Norwich and London, and when, as Dr. Lingard says, the pestilence, "was chiefly confined to the lower orders, for the more wealthy, by shutting themselves up in their castles, in a great measure escaped the infection."

The only way in which it is possible to criticise Mr. Carlyle's political writings favourably is by looking on them as addressed to an imaginary audience. They show what would be the state of the country if all the good qualities of its inhabitants had died out, and all its bad ones were raised to the highest power; but they also show at every point a complete incapacity of estimating justly any subject which comes imme-

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XXVIII.

PASCAL'S PENSÉES.

THE best edition of Pascal's great work is the one which was published by M. Faugère, from the original MS. At the time of its publication it excited great interest, partly on account of its intrinsic merits, partly on account of a variety of heterodox opinions which the publication was supposed to fix upon Pascal, and partly on account of various controversies excited by collateral circumstances connected with the work itself, which, if it had been completed, was to have been called the *Apologie du Christianisme*; the fragmentary character of Pascal's notes makes it so difficult to follow their connection, that it may be well to give a sketch of the general nature of the argument which they embody.

The book was meant to consist of two parts—the second forming a treatise on the Evidences of Christianity, and the first a series of dissertations intended to prove that there is a sufficient *à priori* probability of its truth to induce a reasonable man to accept it on slight positive evidence. It is difficult to make much of the second part of the book. It is partly historical, but principally critical, while a great deal of it was to have turned on the interpretation of the



Prophecies and of the typical and mystical portions of the books of the Old Testament. It is difficult to extract anything complete and systematic from the confused notes upon these subjects which alone remain. The argument of the first part, though expressed in a fragmentary manner, can still be pretty clearly traced. Its general purport is as follows:—There is in all human affairs a radical confusion and absurdity, which leads perpetually to two results diametrically opposed to each other. Men, on the one hand, are haunted by conceptions of truth, justice, virtue, nobleness, and happiness—on the other, they live in a state of things which tends to prove these conceptions to be altogether false. Stoicism, on the one hand, and Pyrrhonism on the other, have a hold on the human mind which it can never shake off. There is a point of view from which Epictetus, and there is a point of view from which Montaigne, is unanswerable. Human nature therefore is corrupt. Christianity recognizes and is founded on that corruption which it professes to be able to repair. The life of its author, and the leading facts of its creed, exalt us to the highest dignity. They also enter into the lowest humiliation of which human nature is capable. There is enough positive evidence in favour of the truth of this system to justify any one in adopting it who feels inclined to do so, and to protect him from ridicule if he does. Inasmuch as, in this world, it frequently happens that there is nothing to act upon but imperfect evidence, in which case the intellect has to pray in aid the promptings of inclination, these considerations complete the case in favour of Christianity, proving, in a few words, that there is no

reason why you should not believe it if you like, that you risk less by believing than by disbelieving, and that you must do one or the other. This, translated into the plainest language—though it is infinitely less plain spoken and emphatic than Pascal's—is the gist of his argument. It would be impossible in any moderate space to discuss, in their principal bearings, the enormous subjects which such an argument embraces. A few considerations may, however, be offered on the special illustrations which Pascal gives upon one branch of his subject, and on the general method of his argument.

Probably under the influence of the example of Descartes, Pascal takes his own feelings as the criterion by which he is to judge of the feelings of mankind at large. He always appears to think that, because a proposition or a view of life appears self-evident to his mind, it must necessarily appear self-evident to every other mind. There are deep traces of this temper in the fragments of chapters which were intended to prove the misery and corruption of man. The grounds upon which he rests this conclusion are, first, the eagerness which men show for amusement and occupation, which, he says, arises from their inward consciousness of their own misery, and their disinclination to be alone with themselves—secondly, the degrading necessity under which we lie of subjecting ourselves to influences obviously deceptive in their very nature, more especially to imagination and to vanity; and, lastly, the disproportion of man to nature. Surrounded as he is by infinity in point of greatness, and infinity in point of littleness, man can see just enough of the world around him

to know that the powers of the mind, vast as their sphere may be, serve only to show him his ignorance.

Such are Pascal's grounds for the conclusion that man is in a position in itself wretched, degraded, and absurd. That much is to be said in favour of such a view is no doubt true, and no doubt it is also true that Pascal had one of those minds which would naturally adopt it; but it is sufficiently obvious that the true value of his observations can be ascertained only by much wider observation and study than he bestowed on the matter. Take, for example, his doctrine about amusement and occupation. "All the misfortunes of life," he says, "may be traced to men's incapacity to sit still in a room." All human occupations he looks upon as merely *diversions* in the etymological sense of the word—expedients for preventing the mind from preying on itself; and thence he infers that to prey upon itself is at once its natural condition and the abiding and conclusive evidence of its corrupt nature. That Pascal's mind may have been in this condition is extremely probable, but that such is the normal condition of human minds in general is a different and a doubtful proposition. Most people would be inclined to say that the mind, like the body, has powers expressly adapted for action, and that if they do not act and are not supplied with suitable objects for acting, the mind is in an unhealthy condition, as much as the body would be if it were confined to one unvarying posture; so that the inclination of the mind to prey upon itself, when deprived of all external objects of thought, no more proves its corruption than the fact that the body moves during life, and lies still after death, proves that death is its

to reiterate his own interpretation, to enforce it with all the resources of humour and sarcasm, to construe every fact and every action in accordance with it, and thus by mere force of style to compel many persons to take his view of historical events and personages, without giving them the slightest hint that other views are equally consistent with the facts of the case.

The defects of this mode of proceeding appear more strongly in Mr. Carlyle's portraits of individuals than in his theories about events. The habit of attempting to estimate men by their essence, and not by their acts, forces those who adopt it to resort to the most meagre evidence as to what the essence of the man is. He has to be judged by his features, his complexion, the nicknames which his enemies give him, little characteristic anecdotes, and other such matters, which are, after all, better fitted for novels than for history. Some one says that Robespierre's face was *verdâtre*, and this furnishes Mr. Carlyle with so many sentences about the "sea-green formula," that his readers feel, at last, that if Robespierre had been sanguine, and Danton bilious, there would have been no Reign of Terror. This mode of painting characters has a strong tendency to obliterate moral distinctions. It suggests, though it certainly does not logically imply, the inference that a man has no other course than that of filling the niche which his character enables him to occupy in a dramatic manner. You may be a huge Danton, full of wild, stormy passion and savage tenderness; or you may be a meagre, strict-minded precisian, like Robespierre, with spectacles instead of eyes, and

a cramp instead of a soul; but there is nothing to teach you that in either case you have duties to fulfil, and that if you cut people's heads off without any sort of excuse, it is no justification to say that you are a mere "logic-formula," you were only acting as such, or that you had a great flaming soul. There is the heart of fact, which impelled you. There is a right and a wrong for "logic-formulas" and for flaming souls as well as for other people. Every man has some kind of character, and where should he be if every one acted up to it, without an effort of self-control?

It is in respect to politics that Mr. Carlyle's determination to rush at once to the heart of the matter leads him into the most wonderful errors. He is no man of genius, being at the same time a good and honourable man, ever wrote two books so honest and injurious as *Past and Present* and the *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*. Considering pictorial imagination as the true mode of arriving at political truth, Mr. Carlyle conceives a sturdy mill-owner, with a strong, broad strength, and earnestly worshipping the mill as an idol, snuffing, sneering, laughing at everything else; a Church, a Parliament, a Court, a House of Commons, and public offices, all babbling and acting as if they were of no account; "deaf creatures" that he has no use for, and having worked them up, and then he says, "There you have England as it is." As a cartoonist he imitates a thirteenth-century abbot, and does his out with inimitable grace and skill. As a caricaturist of the time in which he lived, he is sufficiently depicted, he says, "There

sent day, either tributes to what men naturally reverence, or else they are pleasures which the position of persons in power enables them to enjoy; but wide and woeful experience ought by this time to have convinced the most sceptical that people who calculate upon the weight which such influences will derive from the weakness or corruption of human nature, reckon without their host. The crown and the ermine may ornament a real authority, but they have no power to defend a sham one. It would be impossible to show that in any province of human affairs folly or wickedness is, in a temporal point of view, a source of strength, or of anything more than accidental and exceptional profit, yet the proposition that folly and wickedness are useful in a temporal point of view is absolutely essential to the force of Pascal's argument.

The principal contemporary interest of these observations lies in their bearing upon a mode of arguing which, in all probability, will always be popular, and which was never more popular than it is now. It consists in obtaining an orthodox conclusion from sceptical premisses. It is obvious that if it be impartially applied, scepticism may be made suicidal, for it may be so used as to destroy the difficulties which it has raised. The most famous argument of this class is Bishop Butler's criticism on fatalism. If fatalism, he argues, is applied universally, it becomes unimportant, for it puts injustice upon exactly the same footing as justice. This mode of turning an adversary's batteries on himself has a wonderful attraction for some minds. It forms the substance of several books which have obtained wide

diately under the observation of the writer. When a man or thing stands far enough from Mr. Carlyle to enable him to view it and paint it as a whole, he does so with admirable artistic effect, though with questionable correctness. When it is close to him, he is so much irritated by the irregularities and blemishes of its surface, that he never inquires what is below. He is, on the whole, one of the greatest wits and poets, but the most untrustworthy moralist and politician, of our age and nation.


June 19, 1858.

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by the strongest of human passions? But every man ought, at any rate, to know his own mind and face his own opinions, for whether he avows them to himself or not, they *are* his opinions, and whatever may be the nature of the responsibility which they entail, he is responsible for them.

Such states of feeling are not without example in our own time and country; but a far more common result of the injudicious and sometimes savage and malignant zeal with which Christian advocates preach universal scepticism, in order to shut the mouths of deists, is one of which they little suspect the extent. It is not every one who agrees in Pascal's dogma, that "*il faut parier.*" Sharpen the horns of your dilemma as you will, and the great mass of mankind will still, as a general rule, avoid both, by the simple process of remaining undecided. Almost every one who argues on dilemmas, forgets that there are always three ways of proceeding. If you go on, you must either go to the right or to the left, but you may also stay where you are. The position, no doubt, is logically incomplete, and an argument always assumes that logical completeness is an object to the person to whom it is addressed. It ought, however, to be borne in mind, especially by those who argue on religious topics, that the practical result of their arguments on the mass of their readers is of much more consequence than their logical cogency as against their antagonists. To halt between two opinions is, in ordinary cases, far from unpleasant. The number of people who are sincerely and earnestly desirous of arriving at truth, especially at theological truth, at any expense of suffering

and labour, is small indeed. The number of people who have a curiosity about the matter is enormously large. Try to drive a man of this sort into one view by showing him the difficulties of others, and you only suggest to him that there are difficulties in all. It is impossible to bring home to such a person the conviction that *il faut parier*. Indeed, it is not true. A vast proportion of the business of life—business which the common sentiment of the world rightly regards as necessary and honourable—can be carried on without any distinct theological creed; and such business is so abundant, various, and interesting, that not only is it easy to turn away the mind from theological subjects, but it is extremely hard not to do so. Lazy indifference, slightly relieved by languid curiosity, will prevail amongst the majority of the educated world in reference to theology, just in proportion to the success with which theologians succeed in refuting each other's positive opinions, and in showing that they can return with deadly effect the thrusts which they cannot parry.

Another objection which in practice is conclusive against almost all religious dilemmas, is the difficulty, not to say the impossibility, of making them exhaustive. "You must," is the argument, "be either an atheist or a Christian." But what is that Christianity which forms the orthodox branch of the alternative? Does the choice lie between atheism and Popery, atheism and the Church of England, atheism and Calvinism, or atheism and Lutheranism? Is it quite impossible to escape atheism by resorting to Mahometanism, to Buddhism, to Brahminism, to idolatry,

to a hypothetical deism adopted as a creed which may possibly be true though it is confessedly doubtful? In fact, does the dilemma come to more than this—You must either be an atheist or something else? and is such a dilemma worth having? As a mode of influencing thought or conduct it is not, but its popularity can astonish no one, for it is a way of arguing which affords men who have given in their public adhesion to recognized forms of religion an admirable opportunity of displaying safe audacity, of gratifying their antipathies, and of insinuating to the world at large the conclusion that if they are not as heretical as their neighbours, it is not because they have a greater disposition to belief, but because they have explored scepticism far enough to see that it also is vanity.

September 25, 1858.

XXIX.

JOSEPH DE MAISTRE.

THERE is in all modern speculation, and especially in those parts of it which deal with the principles of politics and natural theology, a sort of eddy or back-water, which runs in the opposite direction to the main stream of thought. There are always a considerable number of persons who want to have a philosophy and a theology of their own, which, whilst it shall be as profound and as important as that which is usually accepted, shall convict the conclusions commonly received upon these subjects of shallowness and feebleness. Dr. Newman's career is as strong an illustration of this state of feeling as could be referred to in our own time and country; but De Maistre's eminence and influence fairly entitle him to be looked upon as the typical representative of that way of thinking or of feeling. His writings illustrate in all respects the weakness and the strength which pervades all speculations of the class to which they belong. Their strength arises from the fact that they usually succeed in setting in a strong light half-truths which their opponents have neglected; and they are thus invested with an air of originality, of richness, and, above all, of positive, as opposed to

merely negative, instruction, which is very seductive to the young and sensitive. Their weakness lies in the circumstance that the positive parts of their teaching are emphatically half-truths, which crumble under the honest application of the ordinary tests of truth, and are frequently destroyed by the arguments to which they appeal. The influence which De Maistre exercised over many of the most distinguished Frenchmen of the existing generation, and especially over persons so different as Comte, M. Lamartine, and the Saint Simonians, is exactly like the influence which Dr. Newman has exercised over some of the finest minds of our own generation in England—over Mr. Froude, for example, and by way of reaction, and what may be described by the contradictory phrase of a sympathetic antipathy, over Dr. Arnold. Like Dr. Newman, he handled great truths in a blundering and fundamentally illogical manner, for each of them invariably omits to prove the minor of his syllogisms, and the strictness with which minors are proved is the great test by which real and sham logic may be distinguished. By the help of realist metaphysics to furnish him with premisses which he could assert to be innate ideas, and strong feeling to indicate the conclusions which these premisses were to support, De Maistre readily constructed arguments which proved whatever he wanted to establish. The evidence necessary to apply his theory to facts was supplied by half-truths neglected by his antagonists. There is hardly a single opinion advocated by De Maistre which would not, upon analysis, appear to have been reached in this manner.

The *Soirées de St. Petersbourg* contains the most

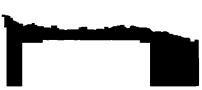
complete enunciation of his views upon the great fundamental questions of science, morals, and theology. It is one of the liveliest and most interesting of books. The vivacity of the style, and the originality, ingenuity, and fervour of the thought give it a charm very like that which belongs to Pascal's letters. As for the opinions which it maintains, it is by no means easy to give a general notion of them to a person who has not read the book; but they might perhaps be faintly indicated by saying that if Bishop Butler had had a taste for paradox, had been a violent partisan of the Stuarts, and had written in a style equidistant between Voltaire and Dr. Newman, he would have produced something not unlike the *Soirées*. To deprive Bishop Butler of his caution and discretion is no doubt like depriving *Hamlet* of the Prince of Denmark. The *Analogy* is throughout an *argumentum ad homines*, intended to show Deists that the objections which they made to Christianity applied equally to the positive parts of their own system; and it is to this circumstance that its great weight and reputation are to be ascribed. If the arguments of the *Analogy* were thrown into a positive form, and were urged, not as answers to silence objectors to Christianity, but as direct proofs of its truth, they would represent very fairly the general character of the *Soirées de St. Petersbourg*. Such arguments are so frequently abused in the present day, and their weight and tendency are so constantly misunderstood, that it is well worth while to consider the manner in which they are applied in a book which certainly invests them with all the adventitious force which style can supply.

The general subject of the *Soirées de St. Petersburg* is the moral government of the world, and its purpose is to vindicate what the highest of the high Tories of the last century—the pupil of the Jesuits, and the most prominent antagonist of the French Revolution and its principles—regarded as the orthodox view of human life and Divine Providence. The book at first falls into the shape of an argument with an objector to the belief that the affairs of life are the subject of a providential government. He is supposed to reiterate the ancient objection that the wicked flourish and the righteous are troubled. To this it is replied, that there is a considerable part of the troubles of life which virtue has a direct tendency to prevent, and vice to aggravate, and that that part of them of which this cannot be affirmed “rains upon men like the balls in a battle,” striking the good and the bad indifferently. De Maistre does not, however, content himself with answering objections. He developes at full length a complete scheme of the providential government of the world, and of the principal laws by which it is conducted. The outline of this scheme is somewhat as follows. All suffering is penal, but it is not in all cases proportional to actual guilt, because there are several eternal principles which prevent such an arrangement. In the first place, all men are in a degraded and fallen state, and as like always produces like, they come into the world with a vitiated constitution. Moreover, men are so connected together, that they can both expiate each other's faults by vicarious suffering, and increase each other's happiness by vicarious merits. It is thus impossible to refer particular

suffering to particular guilt, although it is possible to affirm in general that suffering arises from guilt. The general arrangements of society illustrate these principles on a large scale. The principle that men are connected together is illustrated by the power which a king possesses of pledging the nation of which he is the head to a crime which brings upon it all sorts of punishment, though its individual members may have had no share in the guilt. The nature of the punishments which nations incur is illustrated by war, which, says De Maistre, is supernatural and divine in its character; and this is shown, not only by the strange and unforeseen events by which its course is characterized, but also by the eagerness and vehemence with which men engage in what might have been expected to be so hateful a task.

Such is a sample of the moral side of De Maistre's theory. It rests upon a corresponding view of science and of history. In direct opposition to the theory of the progress of knowledge, which, since his time, has become even more extended than it was in the last century, he maintained that we live in a state of intellectual as well as moral degradation. The notion that the state of nature is a state of barbarism appeared to him the "*erreur mère*" of modern times. This theory was essential to his views, because the positive evidence to which he appealed in support of them was tradition; and in order to give importance to the traditions to which he appealed, it was necessary for him to maintain that they were vestiges of a time infinitely superior to our own in every kind of intellectual activity. From the relics of Egyptian and Etruscan art, from the Cyclopean remains, and, above

all, from the evidence supplied by etymology of a careful and exquisitely skilful adaptation of sounds to thoughts in some very ancient time, as well as from the common tradition of a golden age at the beginning of things, he argued that a time must have existed in which knowledge of all kinds was not only more abundant, but more scientific than it is now. But when did this primitive civilization exist? Geology, according to the views of it which obtained at the beginning of the present century, was supposed by De Maistre not only to demonstrate the universality, but to fix the date of the Noachic deluge at the period usually assigned to it, and history seemed to show that since the deluge such a state of things had been unknown. De Maistre was, therefore, reduced to the assertion (which he made with characteristic audacity and eloquence) that before the deluge men were able to take the *à priori* road to knowledge; that they contemplated things in their quiddity, and, instead of ascending from effects to causes, were able to descend from causes to effects. These were the giants and mighty men of renown spoken of in Genesis, and their superhuman knowledge brought upon its owners a superhuman punishment. This knowledge survived the flood for a short time, and the fact appeared to De Maistre to be proved, amongst other things, by the rapidity with which Noah and his family reconstituted human society after that event. This wonderful science was, however, confined to a few persons, and gradually died out amongst the priesthoods of ancient Egypt and some other primæval nations. The great traditions of expiation, corporate responsi-



bility, the efficacy of prayer, and others of the same kind, are the vestiges of these forgotten marvels. Savages, so far from being in a state of nature, are in a state of miserable degradation—"weighed down apparently by some fearful anathema"—which De Maistre conjectures to have been entailed upon them by the wickedness of their primitive rulers, whose supernatural powers enabled them to involve people in a proportional depth of wickedness. Even the most civilized nations are only toiling painfully, and step by step, towards the height on which their ancestors stood without an effort.

These doctrines rested on the realist theory of metaphysics. The wisdom of the primitive sages arose from the fact that they were able to descend at will from universals to particulars, because they had a clear mental perception of universal truths. In our days, though ideas are still innate, we no longer apprehend them clearly, but are compelled to work backwards to them by laborious processes of detail. Our true wisdom, therefore, lies in attaching the utmost importance to the traditions which are our guides towards that different and higher order of things of which they are at once the evidence and the remnant, and in remembering that our modern processes of thought stop far short of the limits to which human wisdom once attained. Our guide towards these limits is the tradition embodied in that common *quasi*-instinctive sentiment which De Maistre describes as "*bon sens*," in opposition to the conclusions of what is commonly called philosophy. This "*common sense*" (as Reid understood the words) predisposes us to accept as true the traditions from

which it was derived. It assures us, for example, of the efficacy of prayer; it tells us that national calamities are judgments for sins; and, in fact, it supports all through the theory which De Maistre advocates. Thus the belief in primitive science works itself round to a practical appeal to such parts of modern popular sentiment as cannot be referred to any process of reasoning; and it is hardly an exaggeration to say that, in his hatred of modern philosophy, De Maistre contrived a scheme for attaching a magical value to superstition.

His theory of expiation supplies a good illustration. His conclusion is, that the misfortunes of the King, the priesthood, and the aristocracy in the French Revolution were somehow creditable to them—if not in their individual, at least in their corporate capacity. There can be little doubt as to the source which furnished this part of the argument. The minor is, that their sufferings were in the nature of expiatory sacrifices for the sins of their predecessors, and the major consists of the doctrine of vicarious suffering. This doctrine rests partly on the innate idea that all suffering is penal—partly on the traditionary belief that one person can suffer in the place of another. Thus, in so far as the argument is an argument at all, and not a mere assertion, it rests partly on an innate idea, and partly on a half-truth embodied with a most pernicious error. As to the innate idea that all suffering is penal, it is enough to say, that if De Maistre was right in appealing to it, it is hard to see why he went any further. If the proposition is a first truth, antecedent not only to experience but to logic, what is the good

of bringing experience and logic to bear upon it? The assertion has the inconvenience of all arguments which are too good—it supersedes the necessity for anything more..

The doctrine propounded as an innate idea is not, however, by any means so characteristic as the doctrine of vicarious suffering, and the tradition alleged in favour of it. There can be no doubt that this doctrine embraces a most important truth, though it embodies with it another element equally necessary to De Maistre's argument, and which is of a very different character. It would not be proper to take up in this place (as was done by Bishop Butler) the theological side of the subject; but it is important to point out that Butler carefully confined himself to that side of the question, and that De Maistre fell into grievous mistakes when he tried to make considerations which may be well adapted to parry objections against the truth of revealed religion, the groundwork of the every-day business of life. Butler says, "If you admit the providential government of ordinary life, you have no right to impugn the justice of the doctrine of the Atonement, because there are things in ordinary life which more or less resemble, and, so to speak, lead up to it." De Maistre said, "The doctrine in question, as I understand it, supplies the key to all the sufferings of every-day life, which have no visible connection with criminality. It justifies much of the legislation, and many of the sentiments, which the writers of the eighteenth century looked upon as obsolete and barbarous." No one can deny that Butler's argument is weighty, but De Maistre pushes his assertion to an extent which

is perfectly monstrous, and demonstrably false. He does not support his view of life on the ground of its revealed truth. He advances it as a philosophical theory resting on evidence of its own. He maintains, with perfect truth, that it is part of the constitution of the world that the guilty father should transmit diseases to the innocent son; but he also maintains that the son's suffering is in some way an expiation of the father's sin. Without the second proposition, the first would be useless to him; and in proof of the second he has nothing to appeal to but what he calls a general tradition. Nothing can be more characteristic than the whole argument. It is a great truth, a most important truth, and one which several eminent writers in the eighteenth century had neglected, that human beings are bound together in a sort of partnership, so that men's actions have a wide effect for good or for evil; and De Maistre was perfectly right to appeal to universal experience in support of the assertion. But experience would never have taught him that this consequential suffering was also vicarious. The consequences of a debauchee's debaucheries to himself and his neighbours are not affected in any way whatever by their transmission to his children, nor is there the smallest historical or experimental ground for the assertion that the crimes of Louis XV. and the nobles of the eighteenth century were in any degree expiated by the sufferings of Louis XVI. and the other sufferers under the Reign of Terror.

The means by which De Maistre attempted to manipulate truth into falsehood are as remarkable as the manipulation itself. The tradition to which he

appeals is in no sense of the word a tradition—it was merely a common practice, which is quite a different thing. The sacrifices of heathen nations had no doubt many features in common, but it is far more likely that they owed their odious resemblance to the depravity and superstition of human nature, than that they embodied a tradition of which those who practised them never acknowledged the force on other occasions. The Mexicans and the Hindoos immolated their fellow-creatures because they thought that the beings whom they worshipped liked it; not because they wished to transfer to others the penalty of their own crimes. There is something singularly odious in justifying Christianity on the ground of its analogy to the worship of Juggernaut and Moloch. If De Maistre had attended to the denunciations of the Hebrew prophets against those bloodthirsty enormities (“which I commanded them not,” says Jeremiah, speaking in the name of God, “neither came it into my mind”), he would have been better employed than in insisting, with a sort of satisfaction, on the most abominable practices that ever disgraced humanity, in order to squeeze out of them an argument against Rousseau and Voltaire.

This is only one of a thousand cases in which De Maistre stands forward as the great representative of the system so popular at present—of defending what is obviously wrong upon grounds of which the original wrongdoers had no conception whatever, and which are, in fact, mere after-thoughts. When Mr. Froude taught or implied that the early Kings and Parliaments of England deliberately rejected economical in favour of social advantages, and that the importance

attached to classical learning in English education arose from a wish to give the young a knowledge of human nature as it was before Christianity entered as a disturbing force into our system of life—when Dr. Newman justified the whole cycle of Roman Catholic theology on the ground of the doctrine of development—when Dr. Arnold put forward the exclusion of the Jews from Parliament as the proof and embodiment of his theory about the relations between the Church and the State—each of them fell into precisely the same sort of mistake as De Maistre when he tried to justify the judicial and legislative anomalies of ancient France on recondite principles justified by universal tradition, and depending on the ideal character of antediluvian science.

A few short but highly characteristic illustrations may be given in conclusion of the way in which the whole of De Maistre's mind was coloured by these habits of thought. He maintained that the plan of making judicial appointments hereditary and saleable was better suited than any other conceivable arrangement for the French nation—the truth being, that its inherent absurdity was slightly modified by the comparative independence of the central Government which it accidentally conferred upon the judges. The major premiss in this case is, that all sciences have their mysteries, that what is false in theory is true in practice, and that the measures prescribed by these mysteries are beneficial. The minor premiss is that the practice of making judgeships hereditary and saleable was a mystery in the science of French legislation, and was opposed to theory (it is not stated to what theory). The conclusion is that the system

of hereditary and saleable judgeships was beneficial and true in practice. The minor is demonstrably false, and it is hardly possible to suppose that any one would seriously try to prove it. It is, however, an amplification of the half-truth that some of the abuses of the old state of society in France had incidental advantages which were sometimes lost by the revolutionary changes, and it owed its attractiveness to this circumstance.

The whole theory of the ancient traditions is another instance of the same thing. It is true that ancient beliefs and ancient mythologies are important subjects of investigation, but it is absurd to make them the tests of truth. The fact that De Maistre looked upon geology and etymology as the firmest allies of what he considered to be orthodoxy, is enough to give a measure of the extraordinary blindness which afflicted a man whose talent almost amounted to genius when he committed himself to the hopeless task of defending falsehood by the help of truth. When the orthodox horse is butted by the heretical stag, he can get the victory only by taking a bit between his teeth, which may lead him into roads where he had probably little expectation of travelling when he commenced his resistance.

November 27, 1858.

XXX.

PLUTARCH'S LIVES.

FEW books have exercised a wider influence, or possess greater claims to the reputation which they have acquired, than *Plutarch's Lives*. Hardly any other classical book, with the single exception of *Æsop's Fables*, has become part of the popular literature of modern times. The great poets, philosophers, and historians of Greece and Rome are, indeed, known by early association to those who have received a classical education, but they are known to very few who have not. There are probably not a hundred people in England who have read Gifford's *Juvenal* or Hobbes' *Thucydides*, except as commentaries on the original. Pope's *Homer* has a permanent popularity, but it is a popularity which Pope won for himself, and not for the author whom he translated. With *Plutarch's Lives* the case is entirely different. Almost every one is more or less acquainted with them, but hardly any one, however good a scholar he may be, has read them in Greek. As the book does not form part of the ordinary course of reading which entitles people to claim the honours of classical scholarship, and as it is very bulky, the latter fact is easily explained; but its

abiding and extensive popularity is owing to deeper causes. *Plutarch's Lives* unquestionably present at once the most complete and the most interesting picture of the ancient heathen world that any single book affords; indeed, it is the only picture of those times which it is possible to accept as being at once authentic and lively. Most of the ancient histories require a degree of collateral knowledge to make them intelligible which no one can possess without a thorough classical training. To an ordinary English reader, a mere translation of Thucydides would be all but unintelligible, and utterly uninteresting, whilst the works both of Tacitus and Livy derive nearly the whole of their character and most of their interest from peculiarities of style which no translation could possibly retain. Each of these books, moreover, gives only a fragment of the history of Greece or Rome, and an ordinary, or even an instructed reader, would derive far more knowledge of the character of those countries from the works of Mr. Grote and Mr. Merivale, than from any second-hand acquaintance with classical authors. This is by no means true of Plutarch. The vast portrait-gallery of eminent Greeks and Romans of various ages which he has preserved, throws a light on the character of the ancient heathen civilization which enables an attentive observer to trace its main features with little extrinsic aid. No one can read Plutarch carefully, even in the common translations, without being in a position to form a conception—the clearness of which will, of course, depend on the amount of independent knowledge which he brings to the consideration of the subject, but which is pretty

sure to be accurate as far as it goes—of what men were during the period towards which our early attention is so strenuously directed. Indeed, it is surprising to find, upon returning to the subject in maturer life, how much our earliest notions of Greeks and Romans were derived from Plutarch. There are probably few persons who, when they think of classical times, have not an indistinct notion of a set of venerable men always saying and doing memorable things. A certain dignified completeness, like that of the figures in Raphael's picture of the School of Athens, always seems to attend upon their names—a statuelike repose and composure which extends to the language which they used, with its orderly precision and various but systematic inflexions.

It requires no profound classical knowledge to be aware of the fact that this impression is by no means a true one. The increased intelligence and sympathy with which ancient history has been studied since the beginning of the present century has effectually taught us that the ancients were not mere embodied sentiments engaged in acting copy-slip maxims for the benefit of posterity, but real men and women, very much like ourselves. Niebuhr, Dr. Thirlwall, Mr. Grote, Dr. Arnold, and Mr. Merivale have effectually destroyed the pedantry which threw so thick a veil over the eyes of an earlier generation. It may almost be doubted whether they have not gone too far, and induced us to overlook the differences which really do exist between ancient and modern society.

Plutarch's Lives certainly produce an impression which modern historians have disturbed, and to some

extent exploded; and it seems natural to suppose that his view of the subject of his memoirs should have been more true and more sympathetic than any modern view can possibly be. This is, no doubt, to some extent, the result of the artistic beauty of the Lives—a beauty which the stiffness inseparable from translation veils, though it makes it, in some respects, more expressive than the original would be; just as a piece of furniture looks stronger and more solid when the varnish is partly rubbed off than when it is quite new. Viewed merely as models of style and composition, there is nothing in modern literature to equal them. The mixture of gravity and spirit with which each successive story is told is infinitely delightful. We get a perfectly distinct notion of each individual without reading a line which inclines us to despise the writer. One of the favourite cants of the present day is that which consists in scoffing at the dignity of history. Instead of pompous accounts of public transactions, give us, it is said, those minute but characteristic incidents which show men as they are—such incidents as novelists invent when they wish to introduce their characters to their readers. It is one of Lord Macaulay's *dicta* that Sir W. Temple's love-letters have a far greater historical importance than cartloads of protocols and despatches. In the hands of a man of genius like Lord Macaulay himself, such a doctrine may, perhaps, be turned to good results; but as nothing can be more flattering to the idleness and feebleness of common minds, no principle is more dangerous in the hands of common writers. Masses of trivial, irrelevant twaddle have been offered to the world on the strength of it, which

will go far to make posterity believe either that we were a generation of fools or that we deputed the fools of the generation to write accounts of the rest. Plutarch furnishes an excellent example of the means by which this folly may be avoided, whilst the grain of truth which it feebly tries to grasp is retained. Nearly every life contains characteristic anecdotes, many of which have almost passed into proverbs—each gives a clear portrait of the person described—and each conveys a broad, definite impression of the principal transactions in which he was engaged. If any one will try to imagine the sort of lives which Plutarch would have written of Mr. Douglas Jerrold, and which Mr. Blanchard Jerrold would have written of Cato the Censor, he will have a faint conception of the grovelling degradation into which modern biography has fallen. The full bitterness of the melancholy truth can be realized only by those whose province it is to review whatever rubbish the book-sellers find it profitable to publish.

There are circumstances connected with *Plutarch's Lives* which, though independent of their artistic merits, tend to heighten their pictorial, or, rather, statue-like effect. We all remember the parable in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, according to which, when Christian went to the Interpreter's house, he saw a room which looked clean and orderly. A servant entered the room to sweep it, and, as soon as she had done so, raised clouds of dust which quite destroyed its former propriety. Afterwards, she brought a basin of water, and sprinkling that about the room enabled it to be thoroughly and effectually cleansed. According to Bunyan, the room is the heart of man, the

dust his natural corruption, and the sweeping the law which brings it to light and makes him conscious of it. The water is grace, by which the final purification is effected. It is impossible to read Plutarch without realizing the truth of the first part of this allegory; the third belongs to another order of thought and experience. The repose of the heathen and the conflict of the Christian world is the most striking contrast which this world of contrasts affords. In an exaggerated form it may still be seen in India and China. Those countries, and especially the latter, present the spectacle of a people who have their own laws and landmarks, and their own ideal of excellence, and who are not only contented with it, but astonished and horrified at the notion that it should not be universally accepted. The contrast of race and temperament between the East and West is so great, that it prevents us from recognizing in its full force the contrast of religious belief; but with the ancient Greeks and Romans it was otherwise. They were Europeans imbued with all the instincts of Western Europe in their strongest form, and connected with us as ancestors with descendants.

In *Plutarch's Lives* we see the picked specimens of our predecessors as they were before Christianity had introduced new elements into every department of human life. A more profoundly interesting spectacle cannot be imagined. In what respects do we excel these great men? In what do we fall short of them? Whatever we may be inclined to believe from vanity and that time-serving disposition which, for the present, finds it convenient to claim (too often successfully) an exclusive title to the advantages,

temporal and eternal, of Christianity, it is a truth which every candid and thoughtful man must admit, that each half of the question urgently stands in need of an answer. There are points, no doubt, of vital importance on which *Plutarch's Lives* may lead us to congratulate ourselves; but there are other points, and they are neither few nor small, on which they read us a different lesson. Perhaps, the most remarkable respect in which the ancient heathen world differed from our own is in the estimate which those who lived in it formed of themselves and of their own lives and actions. That side of religious belief which contemplates futurity is by no means an exclusively Christian possession. The lessons of "the great teacher Death" are taught impartially in every age and nation of the world, and the various aspects which men may wear in his presence—resigned, defiant, hopeful, or indifferent—found their expression then as they do now. When Bion lamented that the mallow, the parsley, and the anise had a fresh birth every year, whilst we men sleep in the hollow earth a long, unbounded, never-waking sleep—when Cephalus told Socrates, who came to question him on the nature of justice, that as life drew on, Hades, and the shades and judges who peopled it, assumed a dreadful substance and reality—when Horace preached the doctrine of eating and drinking, for to-morrow we die, they only expressed feelings with which sceptical, believing, and indifferent observers in the present day regard the Christian doctrines respecting the rewards and punishments of a future state. Though the nature of the view which men take of the world to come in many essential respects remains

the same, however much its intensity may have altered, the view which ancients and moderns entertain respecting the present world has undergone a profound change—a change which may be described to some extent by saying that the prevailing temper of modern times has almost always been one of deep-seated discontent. It may be said, with considerable plausibility, that that which we call reform and social progress is only a transient and exceptional phenomenon, and that its connection with Christianity is less intimate than it is usually supposed to be, and not by any means certain beyond dispute. But it cannot be denied that it has often, perhaps generally, been the special characteristic of Christian societies to believe in the existence of an ideal of goodness and purity which makes the common affairs of life bear an imperfect and wretched appearance, and to have also a conception of the demands of duty, its sources and its sanctions, which makes every common fault appear greatly more dreadful than it appeared to heathens. M. Huc tells us that one of the greatest of the Chinese emperors on his death-bed commented on his past life by saying that he was the greatest and most fortunate of men—that he had nothing to wish for, nothing to repent of, no flaw in his happiness and prosperity; and that, having had enough, though not too much, he was now quite willing to die. Hardly any man in a Christian country could entertain such a feeling; and if he did, regard for the common sentiments of his friends would prevent him from expressing it. Plutarch certainly stops far short of the insolent, self-satisfaction of the Chinese; and by his constant references to the instability of human

affairs, and his belief in supernatural interferences with the common course of events arising, as he says, from the envy of fortune or the decrees of fate, he shows that he appreciated, to a considerable extent, the seamy side of human affairs. But the temper which pervades his *Lives* is one of great self-satisfaction. It is easy to conceive the astonishment and disgust with which he would have listened to a petition on the part of Aristides or Timoleon, that neither the splendour of anything that was great, nor the conceit of anything that was good in them, might withdraw their eyes from looking on themselves as sinful dust and ashes.

It is of course an easy, as it is a common thing, to make the very consciousness of sin and guilt which distinguishes the Christian from the heathen world a subject of Pharisaical self-righteousness. Too many persons in the present day like to be despised and to despise themselves; and popular lecturers seldom hit a more fruitful vein than when they pick holes in the characters of the great and good men of the ancient world, and pour contempt on them in comparison with the Sunday-school teachers of the present day. Indeed, official comparisons have been published between *Plutarch's Lives* and the little books which are published by tract societies, very greatly to the advantage of the latter. This estimate of human nature is a very poor and bald one. The lives of Timoleon, of Pericles, and of Scipio, are far more wholesome and instructive than the life of the Heir of Redclyffe. And full sympathy is due to the spirit which, half-unconsciously, half-accidentally, has made the study of classical times and the admiration of the

heroes of classical history essential parts of a liberal education. It is at once a memorable and melancholy truth that human nature is corrupt—that it contains much that is evil—bad thoughts, which stimulate bad passions and lead to bad actions; and the fact is one which can never be safely forgotten or kept out of sight; but it is also true, and hardly less important, that evil is a corruption, an accident, a perversion, and not the essence of human nature, and that its great constituent elements are not bad but good. The moral law is a series of prohibitions—"Thou shalt not kill," "Thou shalt not steal;" but utter immobility and vacancy, though it might involve no breach of any one of these rules, is not the ideal of human nature. Who would really wish his children to be idiots or to die in their infancy? That which is thus restrained and hemmed in—the stream to which morality supplies the flood-gates and dams—must be good, and that stream is fed by the normal passions and inclinations of man. Under the existing dispensation men are too apt to lose sight of this great truth, and to make the tacit assumption that it is only by a happy inconsistency that good men ever take part in the common affairs of life. Perhaps this habit of mind is less common at present than it sometimes has been, but it exists very widely, and a vast proportion of the language which people use on these subjects could be justified only by assuming its wisdom.

Plutarch's Lives are as forcible and convincing a protest against this view of life as could be mentioned. It is right that boys should know that there is a light which lighteth not only those who do, but those who,

from the nature of the case, never could, read the Bible, and that some of the greatest and most important virtues that men can exercise are to be learned from a source which is open to all mankind. It is also right that they should be taught to see that goodness cannot be estimated by a debtor and creditor account of good and bad deeds, but that it resides in the general temper of the mind, and is capable of being delineated as a whole, apart from details. It is true that these lessons might be learnt from the Old Testament even more emphatically than from Plutarch, but the moral of the lives of Moses and Joshua, Samuel and David, is not weakened, but strengthened, by a comparison with those of Lycurgus, Solon, Aristides, and Cato.

It would be a great omission in noticing *Plutarch's Lives* to pass over entirely without remark their historical importance. The influence which they exercised over the minds of the more cultivated actors in the French Revolution can be compared only to that which the Bible exercised over the Puritans; and if any evidence were wanted to show the superiority of the scriptural over the classical view of life, it might be derived from a comparison between the Girondins and the Puritans of the Long Parliament. The characteristic levity and ignorance with which large bodies of clever Frenchmen applied the precedents of Plutarch to their own circumstances is one of the most curious facts in modern history. That ignorance of the Bible which, in the present day, led an ingenious Frenchman to quote the text "Man shall not live by bread alone" as "*Cette belle et touchante parole de Chateaubriand,*" suggested to them the notion

that the virtues of a citizen and soldier were incompatible with those of a Christian; and Plutarch would seem to have stood to many of them in the place of a sort of revelation. Madame Roland and Charlotte Corday are well-known instances of this. Few things can be more striking than the vague but powerful impression which was produced on the minds not only of women, but of men whose experience might have been expected to have taught them something better, that at some time or other, and under some circumstances or other—though time, place, and circumstances alike seem to have been shadowy in the extreme—there had been a sort of Golden Age of Republicanism, in which all political arrangements had worked justly and smoothly, and in which a pitch of virtue had been developed never since attained. Plutarch really does lay a sort of foundation for such an impression as this, but it would show wonderful ignorance in any one in the present day to adopt such a view. The dark side of ancient life is so abundantly notorious that it is needless even to point it out, nor could any one in our days read a volume of Plutarch without seeing the broadest evidence of it in every page. That it should have appeared to disclose to many Frenchmen before the Revolution a state of society infinitely preferable to that which they saw around them, is a curious commentary both on the state of France at that time and on the degree of ignorance which prevailed in it respecting the characteristics of the ancient world. The manner in which the French missed the point of that part of Plutarch which they did appreciate is no less remarkable. They mistook its calmness and compression for

theatrical effort, and supposed that because Plutarch describes his heroes with the dignified composure which is one of the first requisites of art, the heroes themselves were always striking attitudes, and saying to the world, "See how composed and dignified we are." Anything more really and essentially unlike an ancient Greek or Roman than a modern Frenchman it is impossible to conceive. When they tried their very best to be ancient Republicans they resembled them only as a plaster cast resembles a marble statue.

April 2, 1859.

XXXI.


PALEY'S "MORAL PHILOSOPHY."

THE Archbishop of Dublin's edition of Paley's *Moral Philosophy* is a book of which the editor and the author have somewhat similar claims to attention. Making allowances for the difference between different generations, and also for that slight but deep distinction which appears to attach almost invariably to the members of the two universities, we might almost have thought that the archdeacon and the archbishop were successive avatars of the same person, if there had been no physical impossibility in the supposition. Each has the same clearness and point of style, each the same hearty terseness, and each has that legal temper of mind which is very uncommon in any one who has not had a legal training, and especially uncommon amongst the clergy.

The lasting popularity and authority which this and his other works have conferred upon Paley are the best of all illustrations of the immense importance of style—of the power of stating opinions clearly, courageously, and with pointed and appropriate illustrations. Paley's book is nothing more than a clear and short epitome of a theory of morals at least as old as Epicurus, connected with

Christianity by considerations of the most obvious kind, and followed by a neat summary of a variety of obvious, or at most not very recondite, duties. Indeed, Paley himself, in his preface, states with perfect truth that his work is little more than an abstract of that part of the diffuse but most remarkable book of Abraham Tucker which bears upon his subject. Though, however, the matter of the work is open to these observations, it would be almost impossible to overpraise its style. Reading Paley is like listening to the speech of a first-rate advocate who has thoroughly mastered his brief; and it might fairly be said that a large proportion of the other works which have been written on the subject are little more than briefs, more or less ill-drawn, from which Paley spoke. Indeed, the whole turn of Paley's mind was that of an advocate. Lardner's *Testimonies* stands in much the same relation to the *Evidences* as the *Light of Nature* does to the *Moral Philosophy*; and in just the same manner the *Natural Theology* is said to contain no original investigations, but to be a mere abridgment of Derham's *Physico-Theology*.

It was probably this absence of originality which induced Paley to elaborate his style with such extraordinary care and success; and it has none of that incompleteness and disproportion which must always mark originality more or less strongly. The love for detail, the partiality for the particular argument or special discovery which has cost hours of solitary thought, and the invention of which is a mental landmark in the composition of a book on such a subject, seldom or never displays itself in any part of Paley's works. All is finished off with a complete elaborate




care which shows that the form assumed in the author's mind a more prominent place than the substance, and that he would have argued, if not with equal force, at least with equal skill, upon any side of any question submitted to him. It is customary, though most unfair, to charge this temper of mind upon Paley as a kind of crime. It ought to be viewed in the opposite light. The subjects on which he wrote engage not only the affections but the prejudices of mankind so vehemently, that it is impossible to overestimate the advantage of finding one writer upon whose immovable consistency the most implicit reliance may always be placed. He is, no doubt, an advocate and not a judge; but he is an honest advocate, from whose statements the logical consequences of any given premiss may be inferred with almost infallible certainty. It is but once or twice that Archbishop Whately takes exception to his logic, though he differs from him upon several questions which have been usually looked upon as essentially necessary to the solution of the question which he discusses. Why should there be anything immoral in a division of labour in controversy, when it is admitted in all other intellectual pursuits? Of the many difficulties imposed by custom on the discussion of morals and theology, none is more serious than that writers always feel themselves called upon to mix up sentiment with argument, to make a point of expressing their detestation of opinions with which they do not agree, and not only to state their convictions on all occasions in the strongest shape, but to rate at the very highest the grounds on which those opinions are entertained. The gist of most of the

accusations of heartlessness and the like which it is usual to bring against Paley, is nothing more than that he did not observe in his writings this most unwise conventional rule.

If we turn from the form to the substance of Paley's book, the controversies which it has excited afford an excellent illustration of the facility with which the very clearest and most powerful thinkers fall into confusion respecting the nature of the questions which they have to solve, if the task of dividing them has not been performed by others. Many as have been the disputes respecting the questions which lie at the bottom of all systems of morality, it is only of late years that the fact that they can be considered upon independent grounds, and are not merely different ways of expressing two opinions on the subject, has been invested with anything like the prominence which it deserves; and even now it is by no means well understood or generally admitted. Archbishop Whately's notes appear to some extent to bring out the distinction in question, but they do not state it categorically; and Paley repeatedly uses language which proves that if the distinction presented itself to his mind, he did not consider it to rest on solid grounds.

It is often asserted, and almost always assumed, that the only question respecting the foundation of morality is, whether the ultimate decision in disputed questions is to be referred to the conscience or moral sense, by whatever name it may be called; or to the principle of utility, according to which the moral quality of an action is determined by its tendency to produce on the whole a balance of happiness. But



closer attention makes it apparent that, in fact, the inquiry as to the nature and test of morality can by no means be settled in so summary a manner. It involves a considerable variety of perfectly independent considerations, which can be properly estimated only by methods which have as yet been but little cultivated, and which may probably tend to results far more complicated than those which we have been accustomed to look upon as embodying one or the other solution of the question. That the words "right" and "wrong" have some meaning or other, is an indisputable truth, and that they are rightly employed to qualify particular actions is equally plain. Millions of people who never read a line of any moral speculation whatever say without hesitation that cheating or lying are wicked, and that honesty and gratitude are good; and it would be as absurd to deny that they have a distinct meaning when they make those assertions, as to say that no one but an astronomer is entitled to talk of years and days, or that no one but a mathematician knows what is meant by a yard or a pound. It is, however, unquestionably true, that it is one thing to have a vivid, and another to have a definite, perception of the meaning of words; and there can be no doubt that the task of discovering such definitions of terms in popular use as may best explain the associations under which, and the connections in which, they are used, is most important, because such definitions, when once propounded, exercise a strong influence over that which they have defined.

It is, however, essential to remember, that in framing a definition the principal question to be con-

sidered is always a question of fact. The person who defines gives, or ought to give, not his own view of the subject which he defines, but the nearest approach that he can obtain to an account of what is passing in the minds of his neighbours. The art of constructing a definition consists in finding a sufficiently large and well-marked class of facts answering pretty correctly to a word in popular use, and in appropriating the word for the future to that class of facts apart from all others. It is thus obvious that to construct a definition of common popular phrases is a very different thing from enunciating a complete theory of the subject to which the definition refers. If in this view a man tries to construct a definition of the words "good" or "bad" as applied to actions, he may very naturally say that he observes that in fact they are applied respectively to those courses of conduct which produce happiness or the reverse; nor is it easy to see why the fact that he adopts that conclusion should expose him to the imputation of teaching a selfish system of morals, or should preclude him from believing in the existence of conscience.

The three distinct questions—In what does the difference between right and wrong consist? how am I to know whether an action is right or wrong? why should I do what is right?—are usually confounded together. It is totally untrue to say that there is anything selfish or degrading in Bentham's theory that the test of the morality of an action is its tendency to produce a maximum of happiness. If any one held and taught the doctrine that an exclusive view to the promotion of his own individual

happiness was the only principle on which every man ought to govern his conduct, he might no doubt be accused, with fairness, of taking a sordid view of human life; but the bare belief that the test of the morality of an action is its tendency to produce happiness is consistent with the most sublime self-sacrifice, and, in point of fact, almost all persons adopt it when they are not arguing about the matter. Indeed, that course is inevitable when more than one person is a party to the discussion of the morality of a proposed course of conduct. On such occasions, the only alternative lies between an internal and an external standard of morality; and as all discussion implies a possibility of agreement between the parties to the argument, and that they tacitly consent to abide by some principle accessible to each, it follows that an external standard of morality is invariably assumed; for if the standard chosen were internal, it would follow either that only one of the disputants could have access to it, or that each would have a standard of his own. Whenever general rules are discussed, they are discussed upon the assumption that results are the test of their soundness, and no one has ever yet been able to bring forward an instance in which adherence to a general rule, which in the long run confessedly produced more pain than pleasure, could be justified in a free discussion. Such an admission would be universally looked upon as fatal to those who made it. A single well-known instance is supplied by the question of the lawfulness of marrying a deceased wife's sister. It would be impossible to mention a single opponent of the bill for legalizing such marriages who thinks

that, on the whole, it should be rejected though the happiness of society would be increased by its passing; nor is there a single advocate of it who is of opinion that its enactment would be right though it could produce misery to many and satisfaction only to a few. The strongest opponent of Paley and Bentham might safely be challenged to produce an instance in which a general rule which he would describe as good was productive of misery; and if it is an admitted fact that goodness always has a general tendency to produce happiness, whilst its essential nature is a subject of endless disputes, it seems absurd to hesitate to accept a tendency to produce happiness—which is always ascertainable by the application of the ordinary tests of experience—as an index to the moral goodness of a course of conduct, in preference to its conformity to a standard which is always subject to dispute.

Agreement with the theory of Paley and Bentham as to the test of morality by no means implies—though it is usually and unjustly supposed to imply—an agreement with their views as to the other questions which are commonly regarded as essential to the construction of a theory of morality. These are the two questions which apply general morality to particular cases:—How am *I* to know what is right? and Why should *I* do right? These questions are entirely independent of the general one, which concerns the test of right and wrong, for they admit of being decided in opposite ways, whilst the decision on the first point remains unchanged. There would be no inconsistency in either of the following creeds upon the subject of morality. A

man might say, "I believe that those actions which generally tend to produce happiness are right, and that those which generally tend to produce misery are wrong; and I also believe that every man has an internal monitor, by which he is warned to do those actions which generally tend to produce happiness and to avoid those which generally tend to produce misery." Or he might say,—“I believe that actions are right or wrong in virtue of their conformity or nonconformity with a certain transcendental rule which has no known or assignable connection with their general tendency to produce either happiness or the reverse; and I hold that men have no internal monitor by which they are reminded of this rule, but that there is a tradition respecting it, which is the best and the only true evidence of its provisions.” In other words, a man might believe in the utilitarian theory of the nature of morals, and also in the supremacy of conscience; or he might believe in a transcendental theory of the nature of morality, and utterly repudiate the doctrine that conscience existed at all, or that, if it did exist, it was a safe guide to the appreciation of the moral character of actions. The doctrine of the guidance of conscience, and the doctrine that happiness is the test of morality, stand in absolutely no logical relation whatever. They are as independent of each other as the questions whether a particular road goes to London, and whether a particular man can show you the London road. Yet such has been the determination of most persons who have written on these matters to find out, not how people are made, but how they might be made, that it would be hard to name any one who,

assuming an external standard of morality, admitted the existence of conscience, or who, admitting the existence of conscience, did not contend for an internal standard of morals.

It is, perhaps, a still more curious point in the controversy upon the existence of conscience, that both those who affirm and those who deny it usually assume that, if it exists at all, it must be the same in all men at all times. Paley argues that it does not exist, because, he says, in various times and countries, different views have prevailed as to the lawfulness and merit of particular actions, so that the crimes of one age and nation have been the virtues of another. Archbishop Whately seems to feel that this objection would be fatal if it were fully made out; but he maintains that there is such a uniformity in the general dictates of conscience from age to age, that we can distinguish between its normal operations and its occasional anomalies, and thus he preserves that unanimity which he apparently feels to be essential to its authority, if not to its existence. It is hard to understand the principle upon which these arguments proceed. That the word "conscience" has a meaning seems indisputable. What the thing may be which it represents—whether it is the same in all men and in all ages—whether it is acted on by circumstances, like the ordinary powers of the mind, or whether it differs from them in kind—and if so, whether or not it is consistent in its operations—are all questions of fact; and surely it is rash to say that the affirmative or negative of any one of them can be assumed without definite and prolonged investigation.

The third question—"Why should *I* do right?"—is obviously independent of both of the others. It is singular that Paley and other writers should have assumed that it is a question which not only admits of, but requires, a peremptory answer. His answer is simple and emphatic to the last degree—namely, that if you do right you will go to heaven, and if you do wrong to hell, which solution, he says, "goes to the bottom of the subject, as no further question can reasonably be asked." No doubt the solution goes to the bottom of the question; but it does not go to all sides of it. Neither Paley's view nor that of the Archbishop of Dublin—which appears to be that men are in some way bound by the constitution of their nature to act in a particular manner—would carry conviction to those who did not exactly coincide with them; and, in fact, neither of these views is the one on which people really do model their conduct. The subject is eminently one of those to which the maxim that the half is better than the whole applies. A probable reason is better than one which "goes to the bottom of the question." The reason why any given man should do right, is partly because his conscience (whether it be a natural or an artificial element of his nature) tells him to do so—partly because there is a strong and general belief that it is advisable to do so, which belief is confirmed by an enormous quantity of evidence of various kinds, direct and indirect—partly because it is generally a man's interest to act right—on the whole, because it appears to be, on every account, the best course to take. Why it should be supposed that, when there are

so many good probable reasons for a particular line of conduct, it should be indispensable to their stability that they should be fortified by some final and conclusive one, is not very clear. The state of mind in which Paley appears to expect to find people in search of morality, is really hardly conceivable. His final argument is an answer to an objector, who, upon being told that he should do right because such is God's will, asks, "Why should I obey God?" The impudence of the question would deserve a different kind of reply. A man must be simply mad with vanity and presumption who would hesitate as to the propriety of doing what he believed himself to be enjoined to do, by an infinitely wise, powerful, and beneficent being.

Paley's book, and the Archbishop of Dublin's commentary, suggest the conclusion that the time for argument on these subjects has almost gone by. What is it possible to add to such writers as Paley, Bentham, Butler, and others who might readily be mentioned, except observations pointing out which are the weak, and which the strong points of their respective systems, and what are the limits of the questions which they discussed. This, however, is a narrow field. It would not be impossible, perhaps not difficult, to exhibit a synopsis of all the metaphysical views which it is possible to take upon the eternal topics of controversy which have exercised the understandings of so many generations. "What shall the man do that comes after the king?"

Though, however, the metaphysical labyrinth is pretty well explored, there is another department of inquiry upon these matters which is hardly touched ;

and every fresh examination of the subject shows the degree in which it has been overlooked or neglected, and the magnitude of the results which may be expected from its cultivation. This is the historical side of the question. About half of Paley's *Moral Philosophy* is occupied by disputations on political philosophy, as he calls it, though he uses the words in a sense somewhat different from that in which they are generally applied in these days. Almost the whole of his views on this subject are ultimately founded on certain theories about natural rights and the state of nature. These questions are all by right historical questions, and the result of this mode of treating them—a mode common to all parties at that period—is that arbitrary assumptions take the place of historical inquiry. Thus Paley goes into the question of the origin of property, and the origin of wills, purely upon grounds of what he calls natural law. He gives a chapter on "the history of property," which consists of a page and a quarter, and is entirely composed of a series of assumptions. Thus, he says, the "fruits which a man gathered, and the wild animals he caught, were the first objects of property;" and as to wills, he says that the power of making a will of the produce of a man's own personal labour is a natural right. In a word, like almost all writers on what is called natural law, whenever anything appears to him to be obviously expedient or extremely probable, he immediately makes it into an historical fact. Now history, patiently examined, can tell us much about the origin of property and of wills, and it discloses results of the most unexpected kind—for example, the connection

between wills and the practice of adoption; nor can any study be more interesting than that of the growth of those institutions which believers in natural law trace by an *à priori* method. Whenever history is applied by competent persons to the investigation of moral and metaphysical questions, and to the growth of metaphysical conceptions, we shall see results which will throw into the shade the ingenuity of *à priori* reasoners upon these subjects.

April 9, 1859.

XXXII.

THE MINISTER'S WOOING.

THE special gift which appears to belong to particular writers of obtaining for their works what the French call a "mad success" is not a high one. The books which are read in every family and sold on every book-stall, which furnish popular platform speakers with half their arguments and all their illustrations, and which convert the author or authoress into the lion of the season, have seldom much substance; or, if they have, it is not to their substance, but to their popular defects that the rage for them is owing. The reason of this probably is, that the region of the mind to which such books address themselves is that which lies uppermost, and which has least permanence about it. In such cases, thousands of amiable and communicative people are ready to say, "my own sentiments better expressed;" and as they like to get an excuse for talking about their sentiments, they find one in praising the book and the authors by whose means their wish has been humoured. It is not, however, by standing on the same level with the rest of mankind, and repeating their transient commonplaces in a piquant style that works of permanent importance are written. An author who looks beyond money

and popularity must be, to some extent, in advance of his neighbours. Indeed, he is inexcusable if he is not, for it is his business to think, and theirs to act; so that, if his thoughts are not better worth having than theirs, he must be incapable of thinking to any purpose. A real work of art is not to be understood at a moment's notice. It will grow upon the world, and educate the minds of the public at large to appreciate its beauty, and will thus have a sounder and more lasting popularity a few years after its production than it had at first.


For these reasons little sympathy was due to the extravagant admiration which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* excited here and in America; nor need any one be surprised at the fact that its popularity, like that of any other party pamphlet, has been as short-lived as it was extensive. The goodness and vice which ran down in unctuous streams from Uncle Tom, Eva, and Legree, were enough to make any one revolt against the book; and the same result was produced even more strongly by the egregious and scandalous injustice which always attends the *argumentum ad misericordiam*. The fact that Mrs. Stowe could describe the flogging to death of an old black in an affecting manner proved nothing whatever as to the general character and results of slavery. Mr. Olmsted's Travels were as much superior to *Uncle Tom* in real importance, as evidence upon the subject of slavery, as they were inferior in accidental importance. To excite the prejudices of a well-dressed mob against an abuse generally acknowledged to be one, may be occasionally useful, but is always in a high degree contemptible. To use novels as weapons

of attack or defence is like giving foul blows in boxing. You may disable your antagonist, but you degrade yourself, and doubly degrade the supporters who applaud you.

The *Minister's Wooing* gives a fair specimen of Mrs. Stowe's real intrinsic power when she is not writing as a partisan, and it shows clearly enough that the impression which she made by her first book was due far more to the speaking-trumpet than to the voice. The story is intended to illustrate the manners and character of the New Englanders—of the generation which achieved the Independence of America, especially in reference to the Puritanical leaven which was deeply worked into their characters. Two, at least, of the persons introduced are alleged to be historical characters. They are Colonel Aaron Burr, who was well-known in American politics at the beginning of the present century, and a certain Dr. Hopkins, whom Mrs. Stowe speaks of with profound reverence as the author of theological books of a singular character, and which, she seems to imply, are still popular amongst certain sections of the inhabitants of New England. The story itself is a mere amplification of the oldest of all the commonplaces of fiction. Dr. Hopkins lives in the house of a certain Widow Scudder, who has a very pretty and pious daughter. The daughter is in love with a rather wild young cousin. The cousin—a sailor—goes to sea, and is supposed to be lost. On the supposition of his death, the girl is about to be married to Dr. Hopkins; but at the critical moment the sailor comes to life again. Dr. Hopkins absolves his bride from her engagement, and James and Mary marry, and live happily ever after.

The real point of the book, as far as it has one, is, that it claims to give a picture of the practical results of extreme Calvinism in active life; and in this point of view it has a certain interest, though not a healthy one. The chief figure in the book is Dr. Hopkins, the divine, and its most remarkable feature consists in descriptions of the way in which his teaching practically affected various classes of hearers. The character of his doctrine is stated by Mrs. Stowe, as follows:—

“According to any views then entertained of the evidences of a true regeneration, the number of the whole human race who could be supposed as yet to have received this grace was so small that, as to any numerical valuation, it must have been expressed by an infinitesimal. Dr. Hopkins in many places distinctly recognizes the fact that the greater part of the human race up to his time had been eternally lost, and boldly assumes the ground that this amount of sin and suffering, being the best and most necessary means of the greatest final amount of happiness, was not merely permitted, but distinctly chosen, desired, and provided for, as essential in the schemes of Infinite Benevolence. He held that this decree not only *permitted* each individual act of sin, but also took measures to make it certain, though, by an exercise of infinite skill, it accomplished this result without violating human free agency. . . . Dr. Hopkins boldly asserts that all the use which God will have for them (the damned) is to suffer. This is all the end they can answer; therefore, all their faculties, and their whole capacities, will be employed and used for this end. . . . The body can by Omnipotence



be made capable of suffering the greatest imaginable pain without producing dissolution, or abating the least degree of life or sensibility. . . . One way in which God will show his power in the punishment of the wicked will be in strengthening and upholding their bodies and souls in torments which would otherwise be intolerable."

It was one principal evidence of a regenerate disposition to be able to acquiesce in this as the best possible arrangement. The men who preached these doctrines were eminent (Mrs. Stowe says) for their holiness and virtue, and were so far from being insensible to the horror of what they preached that their lives were bowed down and burdened by the intolerable agony of believing their own theories. Their doctrines, she says, exercised such an influence over the minds of the society in which they lived that they were the common subject of discussion by all classes of men and women on all occasions. The farmers talked them over at their work, their wives at the tea-table, and their servants at the plough-tail. The *Minister's Wooing* aims at depicting this, and, accordingly, we have portraits of members of all sorts of classes under the pressure of Dr. Hopkins's theory of Disinterested Benevolence. The tender, pious, susceptible girl who has lost her lover; the imaginative mother who has lost her son; the shrewd, clever, managing widow who looks after her own and her daughter's salvation with the same keenness as she shows in managing her house; the meek little farmer who, whilst a pattern of every form of self-denying virtue, passes through the world groaning and trembling because he cannot come up to his minister's standard; his fat,

sleepy wife, who rather enjoys being harrowed up into a momentary excitement; and his high-spirited daughter, who accepts her position as one of the wicked, and makes the best of it as cheerfully as she can; are all depicted in turn, with considerable skill, as illustrations of the effects which the very highest form of High Calvinism would produce upon different specimens of the population of New England.

Mrs. Stowe occasionally appears to be struck with the reflection that she has chosen a strange subject for a novel, and she apologizes for it by saying that she could not have drawn a picture of New England as it was without giving theology its due prominence. The conclusion appears to be that she should have held her peace altogether. There really are some subjects which are too solemn for novelists, strange as such an opinion may appear. Of the many gross outrages on decency which have been perpetrated by French writers, none was so gross as the adaptation of the history of the Crucifixion to the exigencies of the feuilleton. But though there is, of course, an infinite difference in degree, and probably hardly less difference in execution, the principle of the *Minister's Wooing* is precisely the same. To some persons, Dr. Hopkins's opinions may probably appear to be eternal truth; to others, they may appear—as a much less energetic version of them appeared to Wesley —“blasphemy to make the ears of a Christian to tingle,” and a justification for a call to the devils to rejoice, and to death and hell to triumph. Mrs. Stowe appears, to judge from her book, to incline to the former view. It is, indeed, true that, with that shuffling timidity which is the characteristic vice of

novelists, she does not commit herself to anything, but talks about it and about it—putting Dr. Hopkins and his views in all sorts of positions, looking at them under every possible aspect, contrasting them with the activity of one person, the apathy of another, and the commonplace vulgarity of a third, with that effectiveness which any one may obtain who does not shrink from peeping and botanizing upon their fathers' graves. Whatever may have been the true value of the works of Jonathan Edwards and Dr. Hopkins, a religious novelist owed them more respect than Mrs. Stowe has shown. The themes on which they wrote were far too awful for a novelist. The only question about them which can interest any rational creature is, whether they are true or false. The only circumstance respecting them on which a novel can throw any light is their relation to common life.

Now, every one admits that the average tone and temper of every-day existence is not our ultimate rule—that if theology is worth anything at all, it must form the rule and guide of our daily lives, instead of being guided by them; and, therefore, a novel which (as all novels must) takes daily life as its standing ground, and shows how it is related to theology, has no tendency whatever to show the truth or falsehood of the theological doctrines which it describes. In so far as Mrs. Stowe's book can be said to have any moral at all, it is that we ought to keep our minds in a sort of hazy devotional warmth, and hope for the best, and that any consistent or explicit theological belief upon the great topics which form the basis of theology is self-condemned. The semi-conscious approach to a cross between a senti-

ment and an opinion which appears to form the premiss of the book, is that no theological opinions are true which are either un-Calvinistical or very unpleasant; and that, as most Calvinistical doctrines are extremely unpleasant, and involve the damnation of a great many agreeable people, the mind ought to be kept floating in a sort of tincture of Calvinism which, if it ever were reduced to definite statements of any kind, might perhaps turn out not to be as bad as might be expected.

This is as near an approach to a moral as Mrs. Stowe's book will yield. It would be rash to offer it with confidence, or to contend that she is any way committed to the proposition (if it is one). Such as it is, however, it furnishes an admirable illustration of the truth of the assertion that novels on serious subjects are the curse of serious thought. The difficulty of serious reflection upon any subject, and especially on theological subjects, is incalculably increased by those who overlay the essential parts of the question with a mass of irrelevant matter, which can have no other effect than to prejudice the feelings in one direction or another. If there is ground to believe that agreeable people really will be damned, the probability or improbability of that opinion will not be affected in the remotest degree by setting before the world minute pictures of these agreeable people, and by asking pathetically whether it is really meant that such a fate can overtake men and women who laugh and joke, and eat their dinners, and make love, and enjoy themselves like all the rest of the world. Of course, no one doubts that, if it is true, it is a great pity. The only question which reasonable

people can ask with any interest is whether it is true. Temporal punishments are often remarked upon in the same style. M. Hugo, for example, in the *Dernier Jour d'un Condamné*, counted out the minutes of a man who was to be guillotined, and described in endless detail every separate sensation attending that condition. The inference suggested (of course, it was not drawn) was that society did not know what it meant by condemning a man to death; and that, if it did know, capital punishments would be abolished. The true inference was altogether the other way. People knew in general that it was very unpleasant to be guillotined, and they meant it to be so. The particular items which made up the total were quite immaterial, and M. Hugo's book was accordingly as much beside the mark at which he aimed as Mrs. Stowe's book is beside any mark whatever of a doctrinal kind.

It may be urged that the *Minister's Wooing* is merely a picture of a state of society, and that the authoress was not bound to do more than to paint it truly. But this is false in fact; for it is full of such vague hints at argument as have just been described. And, besides this, the argument is bad in principle, for the book undoubtedly does produce an impression very unfavourable to Calvinism; and though that system is one which is open to observation it ought not to be attacked upon irrelevant grounds. Any one who describes things heartily and vividly takes up, for the time, the position described. By giving all the details of the eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, which was going on in New England notwithstanding Dr. Hopkins and his Disin-

terested Benevolence—by throwing what she has to say into the form of a novel, and by winding up the story with a happy marriage—Mrs. Stowe virtually adopts the cheerful view of life, and rejects the awful one; and the only approach to a justification for this which the book contains is that the awful view is unpleasant. It is impossible not to resent this. Whatever may be asserted to the contrary, the fundamental beliefs upon which all human conduct proceeds do not depend upon inclination, but on conviction; and there is hardly any more urgent necessity for men or nations than that those fundamental convictions should rest upon grounds which, if they do not exclude doubt, at any rate show what is doubtful and what is not—what is light and what is darkness. Whether there is a God—whether we can argue respecting his character from any data except those which revelation supplies—whether there is any revelation at all, and if so, what are its limits, and what its interpretation—are the overwhelming questions on which hangs all human life. To these Dr. Hopkins and Jonathan Edwards gave one set of answers. Others would give very different ones, but it is by those only who can discuss these subjects upon those terms that either Calvinism or any other creed whatever can be properly criticised. To make any step towards the discovery of the truth upon these matters is the most important, as it is the most awful, enterprise which any man can propose to himself; and it is impossible not to feel a strong sense of indignation against those who nibble at such questions, gossip about them, and, as far as their influence extends, try to substitute for the adamantine foundations on

which any genuine faith must rest the mere shifting sand and mud of personal sentiment and inclination.

If the real drift of theological novels is extracted and thrown into plain words, its irreverence is horrible. In the present work there is a certain Priscilla, or as she is always called, Miss Prissy, a dressmaker, who is always in a little fuss about dresses and weddings. She is always bustling about with silks and satins—talking, laughing, and gossiping in a harmless lively manner. This woman, amongst others, is brought within the shadow of Dr. Hopkins and his theories; and the suggestion whenever she comes upon the stage is, "It is impossible that Dr. Hopkins's theories about eternal damnation should be true, for it would be very odd and incongruous if Miss Prissy were to be damned." The suggestion is unfair, and its indirectness makes it worse. No one doubts that an average human mind would see great incongruity and oddity in such an event; but the question is, whether, and to what extent, average human notions of congruity and singularity may be relied upon for the purpose of testing the truth of statements as to the operations of the divine mind. Upon that point Mrs. Stowe would have a right to be heard if she had anything to say; but till it is decided, it is not only premature, but irreverent and unfeeling, to introduce the subordinate question.

The gospel of vagueness and sentiment has obtained a miserable currency in these times. We think that the sea will never come, the waves never beat, the floods never rage again, and we accordingly build our houses on the sand. This is a great evil; for even if it be true that society is so firmly organized

that we have got to the end of those trials which search the heart and reins—if we have secured for ourselves and our heirs for ever that fair chance of being comfortable, provided we are industrious, which may be roughly taken as the meaning of the phrases “civilization” and “social progress,”—it is still not the less important that our mental foundations should be firmly settled. We have still got to live, to marry, to educate children, to discharge some duty in life, and, after all, to die, and go we know not where; and there is something infinitely contemptible in doing all this in a blind, helpless, drifting way, with nothing to guide us but a strange hash of inclinations and traditions. If any spectacle can be sadder than this, it is that of clever, ingenious people who pass their lives in gossiping about the great principles in which their forefathers really did believe, and by believing in which they purchased for their children the inestimable privilege of being able, without conscious inconvenience, to do without any principles at all, and to pass their time in prattling over incongruities between their practice and the small remnant of their theories. The *Great Eastern*, or some of her successors, will perhaps defy the roll of the Atlantic, and cross the seas without allowing their passengers to feel that they have left the firm land. The voyage from the cradle to the grave may come to be performed with similar facility. Progress and science may, perhaps, enable untold millions to live and die without a care, without a pang, without an anxiety. They will have a pleasant passage, and plenty of brilliant conversation. They will wonder that men ever believed at all in clanging fights, and blazing

towns, and sinking ships, and praying hands ; and, when they come to the end of their course, they will go their way, and the place thereof will know them no more. But it seems unlikely that they will have such a knowledge of the great ocean on which they sail, with its storms and wrecks, its currents and icebergs, its huge waves and mighty winds, as those who battled with it for years together in the little craft, which, if they had few other merits, brought those who navigated them full into the presence of time and eternity, their Maker and themselves, and forced them to have some definite views of their relations to them and to each other.

October 22, 1859.

XXXIII.

MR. MANSEL'S METAPHYSICS.

MR. MANSEL has just republished, in a separate form, an article on metaphysics which he contributed to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and which illustrates the common conviction that it is almost equally unlikely that metaphysical inquiries should ever lose their interest or ever issue in any conclusion. It is not necessary, in order to account for this, to resort to the humiliating theory that metaphysics are merely a game which ingenious people may play at indefinitely. The true inference is that their value must not be measured by their tendency to produce unanimity. They have substantial indirect results, for they furnish convincing proofs of the falsehood of many opinions, though they may not prove the truth of any. Almost all discussions upon politics, morality, theology, and other subjects which interest human beings as such, involve metaphysical considerations; and if it can be shown that the metaphysical foundation of a proposition belonging to any one of these subjects is wrong, the proposition itself falls to the ground, though it does not follow that the proposition is true because its metaphysical foundation is not shown to be unsound. A man's metaphysical opinions thus almost always

are, and are almost universally regarded as being, the fortifications of his opinions, or of the opinions of those with whom he sympathizes, upon matters of more immediate interest; and every new metaphysical system, even if it differs little in essence from its predecessors, may be regarded as a new line of works thrown up to defend a position which always has been, and always will be, attacked and defended with all the resources which the existing state of skill and science can bring to bear upon it. The questions of free will, moral obligation, and the origin of knowledge, are like the barrier fortresses of Belgium and France. They are bones of contention in every generation, and are occupied sometimes by one power and sometimes by another, whilst they have been, or will be, attacked and defended by battering-rams, by archers, by arquebuses, and by Armstrong guns. The obstinacy and continuity of the warfare rather enhances than diminishes its interest; for, as the question whether Antwerp is to be French or Belgian for a whole generation is one of vast importance to that generation—though it is highly probable that in thirty or forty years the old quarrel will have come round to the old place—so the determination of the question whether, at a particular time, nominalism or realism is to give the tone to the leading minds of the period, though it constantly recurs, decides as constantly the whole complexion of each successive age.

Mr. Mansel's contribution to the great perennial controversy is a remarkable one. It is remarkable for its weight and brevity, and for the precision and vigour of the language in which it is embodied. It

is divided into two parts, of which the first treats of psychology, and the second of ontology—which include respectively the philosophy of the phenomena of consciousness, and of the realities by which consciousness is produced. Consciousness is a state of the conscious person, and though in itself a single act or state, may be mentally resolved into two elements—intuition, or presentative, and thought, or representative consciousness. Presentative consciousness is the recognition by the mind of sensation. Representative consciousness, or thought, includes three stages—the formation of a mental image of the object perceived by presentative consciousness; the formation of a general notion derived from a number of similar images; and the appropriation of a sign—generally (though not always, as in the case of the deaf and dumb) a name or word—to the notion. Thus the mind recognizes the impression which a tree makes on the retina of the eye—this is presentative consciousness. It then depicts it. From many such pictures it forms a general notion, and to that notion it at last appropriates a name. These three acts together constitute thought, or representative consciousness. By an obvious analogy, consciousness may be viewed in relation to its matter or to its form. The impressions supplied from without constitute its matter. The mind itself supplies the form which, in its widest sense, is that of relation to the mind; but this universal characteristic of consciousness manifests itself under the two special forms of space and time, subject to which we conceive, and cannot but conceive, all existences whatever; for every object which affects the senses occupies some portion of

space, and every thought which occurs to the mind occupies some portion of time. As space and time are invariable elements of every act of consciousness, which no effort of thought can get rid of or conceive as absent—and as they are, both logically and in some degree chronologically, prior to the objects of sense—they are, in Mr. Mansel's opinion, innate elements of the ideas which experience calls into actual consciousness.

Passing from these general forms of consciousness to its special forms, he proceeds to describe the action of the different senses, as well as that of the different powers and passions of the mind; and amongst these he includes several elements the existence of which always has been, and will be, hotly contested. The most important of these are as follows:—He agrees in the opinion that there is in morality an intuitive element as well as one which is contributed by experience, though he observes that the two are so much mixed up together from the very beginning of our conscious life that we cannot say how much of our existing conception of morality at any given time belongs to either; but he believes that the distinction between good and evil, right and wrong, is an ultimate one, perceived, like the distinction between colours, by an intuition which supplies the foundation of all subsequent reasonings. He believes also in free will, the evidence of which he asserts to exist “in the consciousness of the power of choosing between two alternative determinations.” He also believes that people are directly conscious of their personal existence. “Unless our whole consciousness is a delusion and a lie, *self* is something more

than the aggregate of sensations, thoughts, volitions, &c. . . . I am immediately conscious of *myself*, seeing and hearing, thinking and willing." "This personality can be made clearer by no description or comparison, for it is revealed to us in all the clearness of an original intuition." He also believes that thought has its form as well as its substance, and that this form consists of three "laws of thought as thought"—which are identity (A is A), contradiction (A is not- A), and the law of the "excluded middle" ("every possible object is either A or not- A "). These three principles are the foundation of formal logic. Finally, he maintains that it is a "fact of consciousness which it is the duty of the philosopher to admit, instead of disguising it to suit the demand of a system," that "there are certain necessary truths which, once acquired, no matter how, it is impossible by any effort of thought to conceive as reversed or reversible." These are of four kinds—Logical judgments, in which the predicate is identical with the whole or part of the attributes comprehended in the subject, as that every triangle must have three angles; mathematical judgments, which express a necessary relation between two distinct notions concerning quantity, continuous or discrete, as that two straight lines cannot enclose a space, or that $7 + 5 = 12$; moral judgments, which state the immutable obligations of certain laws of conduct, whether actually observed in practice or not, as that ingratitude or treachery must at all times, and in all persons, be worthy of condemnation; and lastly, metaphysical judgments, expressing an apparently necessary relation between the known

and the unknown, between the sensible phenomenon and the supersensible reality—as that every attribute belongs to some substance, and that every change is brought about by some cause. The logical judgments are only particular cases of the general laws of thought just mentioned. The mathematical judgments, though suggested by the experience of external phenomena, are supplied by the direct intuition of the mind itself that two straight lines cannot enclose a space, or that two and two make four. Moral judgments, in the same way, give experience its form, and do not receive their form from it. Upon observing certain facts, I am conscious of an obligation to act in certain ways in reference to them, nor is it in my power to suppose this obligation to be reversed whilst my own personality is unchanged, for it is a constituent element of my personality. The metaphysical judgments as to cause and substance do not appear to Mr. Mansel to be as certain as the other three. They are only accidentally and not essentially necessary. We cannot think about qualities except as being the qualities of some thing, nor can we think of any occurrence except as preceded by some other without which it would not have occurred. But this inability is capable of being resolved into association.

Such are the principal points maintained by Mr. Mansel in relation to the constitution of the mind itself. Of that upon which the mind acts, or ontology, he says very little, and most of what he does say consists of an account of the views of others. His own opinions are summed up shortly in the book itself, and must here be referred to in a manner even more summary. The principal subjects upon which

we think are the external world, ourselves and our own constitution, theology, morality, and all that is included under the word taste, in its most extended sense. Mr. Mansel maintains that, in relation to all these subjects, with the single exception of ourselves, or psychology, we deal with phenomena only, and not with realities—that all we can say about the external world is that we think, and are, by the constitution of our minds, compelled to think, certain thoughts, but that we have no means of ascertaining whether in fact there are, or are not, any realities independent of, and corresponding to, these thoughts. He entertains the same opinion with regard to theology, morality, and taste; but with regard to psychology, he says it is otherwise, for our consciousness does not prove, but constitutes our existence, and that consciousness asserts the existence of a permanent self under and inclusive of successive modifications, of which some are passive, and others active and determined by free will.

Such is a sketch of the main positions of Mr. Mansel's book—compressed, no doubt, to an extent which is barely compatible with a fair representation of its purpose and spirit, and which is incompatible with that full recognition and exemplification of the intellectual merits of the author which it would be unjust to omit from a more extended notice. It is, however, sufficient to render intelligible some observations on the general character of the class of speculations to which Mr. Mansel's work belongs. The practical importance of metaphysics depends principally on the fact that the two great metaphysical schools are the representatives in abstract speculation

of the two great parties which divide between them almost every department of human affairs. To use a rough and scanty, but intelligible metaphor, those who refer our knowledge to sensation and experience are the Whigs, and those who refer it to intuition are the Tories, of speculation. The tacit conviction that this is so in the main, though the observation would require many important modifications before it could be advanced as even approximately true, is that which gives to metaphysical inquiry almost all the interest which it possesses for the world at large. Perhaps the broadest explicit metaphysical question in which this sentiment could find its full expression is, whether there are any opinions whatever in any department of human affairs which are by their own nature exempt from criticism and inquiry, and which, therefore, furnish that for which human nature is constantly craving, in one way or another—an ultimate, infallible standard of truth, by comparison with which the truth or falsehood of specific opinions may be decided. It will appear, from the foregoing account of his opinions, that, with many limitations and explanations, Mr. Mansel answers this question in the affirmative, though his *admission* (it is his own term, and it is a very characteristic one) that all departments of thought, including theology, but excepting psychology, are concerned with phenomena, and not with absolute realities, makes his speculations far more formidable to all received opinions than almost any others which have attained any considerable popularity. This point need not be discussed here, however interesting it may be to those who suppose that in Mr. Mansel they have at length found the

Athanasius who is to beat down the heresies which flourish so vigorously in various departments of theological and social belief. The validity of his affirmative answer to the question just stated is a subject of discussion more suitable to this place. With all the skill of a subtle controversialist, Mr. Mansel contrives to put his propositions in a form which makes it very difficult for any one to be sure whether he agrees with them or not. The distinction between psychology and ontology—between the subject which thinks and the objects of which it thinks—is broad in appearance, but subtle in reality, for it is next to impossible to keep up in speculation the distinction between the object which suggests the impression and the impression which is suggested: Indeed, the distinction itself (as Mr. Mansel admits) is hypothetical, and it is inevitably unnoticed by language. Thus, the earlier part of Mr. Mansel's book is full of propositions which are ontological in their terms, and would be so understood by any ordinary reader, but which he might probably defend against objectors by saying that he asserted them only psychologically.

There is, however, one objection to the whole of his theory upon the subject of consciousness which, if well founded, goes to the root of all attempts to lay down unassailable propositions. This objection seems occasionally to present itself to Mr. Mansel's mind; but he never fully states it, and, of course, does not answer it. It is as follows:—Thought, Mr. Mansel tells us, is composed of four stages or elements. First, there is the mental recognition of that physical emotion which constitutes one branch of sensation; next, imagination; then the formation

of a notion from many images; and, lastly, the naming of the notion by means of language. Thought, therefore, implies language as its indispensable instrument; and, so far as we know, where there is no language there is no thought, in our sense of the word. Thus, whatever can claim the name of knowledge must be embodied in words or signs. Assuming [this account of thought and of language to be true, it follows that between the first direction of the mind to any object whatever, and the enunciation of any proposition whatever about that object, there are four different openings at which any amount of error may enter—which error, being antecedent to the very construction of language, cannot be eliminated by its use. First, the mind may not fully take in the information which the senses supply; and that it does not always do so is plain from the fact that by repeated and careful attention we increase our knowledge of the appearance of objects. When a man looks, for example, at a pattern, he sees, first, a surface of confused colours, and afterwards colours disposed on a particular plan. Next, the imagination may form a more or less exact and complete picture of the object perceived. Thirdly, the notion derived from these pictures may express the important common features of each with infinitely various degrees of accuracy and completeness. And, lastly, the same is true of the appropriateness of the sign or word which is affixed to the notion. Thus words, which are the materials of thought, are impregnated with error. Daily experience informs us of the consequences. If any one attempts to determine the meaning of any one of the


familiar words which are constantly passing his lips, he will find that each has its history, and that many form a sort of summary of the thoughts and observations of ages. What, for example, is the meaning of the common words "gentleman" and "comfortable?" Essays, perhaps volumes, might be written on either of them. What is meant by any one of the words which enter into the propositions asserted by Mr. Mansel to be absolutely and eternally true? Consciousness, he says, assures me of my own existence. But no one, as Mr. Mansel would say, is "presentatively" or directly conscious of a proposition. No one feels that the words "I exist" are absolutely true. What we all feel is something which we describe by those words, not because we know that they are absolutely true, but because we have always been accustomed to hear them. Our direct consciousness neither does nor can decide whether any and what ambiguities and mysteries lurk in the two words "I" and "exist," any more than that part of our consciousness to which we give the name of a perception of water tells us whether water is or is not composed of oxygen and hydrogen. What that is to which the word "I" is affixed, is a boundless question. The word "exist" is a mere metaphor. No one could say that he was conscious of the proposition "I stand out;" and who can say what is the exact distance from its original meaning to which the word has travelled?

If these considerations are well founded, it will follow at once that whatever may be the process by which we arrive at what we call our knowledge—whether it is the result of mere experience, or

whether, as certainly appears far more probable, the mind itself contributes something to what Mr. Mansel calls the form of thought—it will equally follow that such a thing as a self-evident verbal proposition, the absolute truth of which can never be contested, is not to be found; for the question as to the meaning of the words in which it is couched is always open, and the assertion that the words are either founded on imperfect observation, or imperfectly express the observation on which they are founded, or are incomplete metaphors, or are defective in some other essential particular, must always be open to proof. This is greatly confirmed by the circumstance that almost every word which describes mental operations is obviously metaphorical, and may therefore be assumed to be tentative and incomplete. To “attend,” for example, is a metaphor from stretching; to “apply,” a metaphor from folding; and men who have made a special study of philology would be able to illustrate this observation indefinitely. One thing at least is certain, that if any words are original names of specific things, and exactly fit and express them, many more are not, and we can never know which are which. Who, for example, can say that the words “space” and “time,” of which Mr. Mansel speaks so definitely, really describe the things to which they apply as nearly as human language can describe them? Every one knows that nothing is more easy than to extract from the word “space” every sort of contradiction. Surely it is at least as possible that this may be the fault of the inadequacy of the word as that it proceeds, as Mr. Mansel seems to think, from conditions under which, by the

constitution of our nature, we are compelled to think.

This objection lies against the whole of Mr. Mansel's theory, and is readily applied to each member of it. It entirely overthrows the authority of consciousness considered, as Mr. Mansel seems to consider it, as an enouncer of infallible dogmas; for consciousness is (or rather issues in) thought, thought must be embodied in language, and language is tentative, incomplete, and sometimes contradictory. This doctrine does not, however, lead, as it might appear at first sight to lead, to universal scepticism. It only shows what consciousness cannot do, but it by no means follows that men cannot be sure of anything, or even that the constitution of their own minds contributes nothing to that certainty. It would no doubt tend to overthrow that transcendental authority which Mr. Mansel claims for particular propositions; but it leaves untouched that other certainty of the truth of the very same propositions which is derived principally from experience, partly, in all probability, from experience modified by some attributes of the mind which it is beyond the power of human knowledge, at least in its present condition, to specify with precision. This may be illustrated by a single case. Mr. Mansel asserts that it is a "necessary truth" that two and two make four, that "by no possible effort of thought can we conceive that twice two can make any other number than four . . . nor yet can we conceive it possible that by any future change in the constitution of things, *even by an exertion of Omnipotence*, these facts can hereafter become other than they are, or that they are otherwise in



any remote part of the universe." We are, he adds, far more certain that this is so than that day and night will continue, because it is a truth "conceived as possessing an eternal and absolute necessity which no exertion of power can change," whereas the other is "only one out of many possible arrangements."

The question is, whether our certainty of the truth of the multiplication table arises from experience or from a transcendental conviction of its truth excited by experience, but anterior to, and formative of it. Let Mr. Mansel consider this case. There is a world in which, whenever two pairs of things are either placed in proximity or are contemplated together, a fifth thing is immediately created and brought within the contemplation of the mind engaged in putting two and two together. This is surely neither inconceivable, for we can readily conceive the result by thinking of common puzzle tricks, nor can it be said to be beyond the power of Omnipotence, yet in such a world surely two and two would make five. That is, the result to the mind of contemplating two twos would be to count five. This shows that it is not inconceivable that two and two might make five; but, on the other hand, it is perfectly easy to see why in this world we are absolutely certain that two and two make four. There is probably not an instant of our lives in which we are not experiencing the fact. We see it whenever we count four books, four tables or chairs, four men in the street, or the four corners of a paving stone, and we feel more sure of it than of the rising of the sun to-morrow, because our experience upon the subject is so much wider and applies to such an infinitely greater number of cases.

Nor is it true that every one who has once been brought to see it is equally sure of it. A boy who has just learned the multiplication table is pretty sure that twice two are four, but is often extremely doubtful whether or not seven times nine are sixty-three. If his teacher told him that twice two made five, his certainty would be greatly impaired.

It would also be possible to put a case of a world in which two straight lines should be universally supposed to include a space. Imagine a man who had never had any experience of straight lines through the medium of any sense whatever suddenly placed upon a railway stretching out on a perfectly straight line to an indefinite distance in each direction. He would see the rails, which would be the first straight lines he ever saw, apparently meeting, or at least tending to meet, at each horizon; and he would thus infer, in the absence of all other experience, that they actually did inclose a space, when produced far enough. Experience alone could undeceive him. A world in which every object was round, with the single exception of a straight inaccessible railway, would be a world in which every one would believe that two straight lines enclosed a space. In such a world, therefore, the impossibility of conceiving that two straight lines can enclose a space would not exist; and Mr. Mansel rests his conclusion, that straight lines could not under any circumstances enclose a space, on the impossibility of conceiving that they should do so.

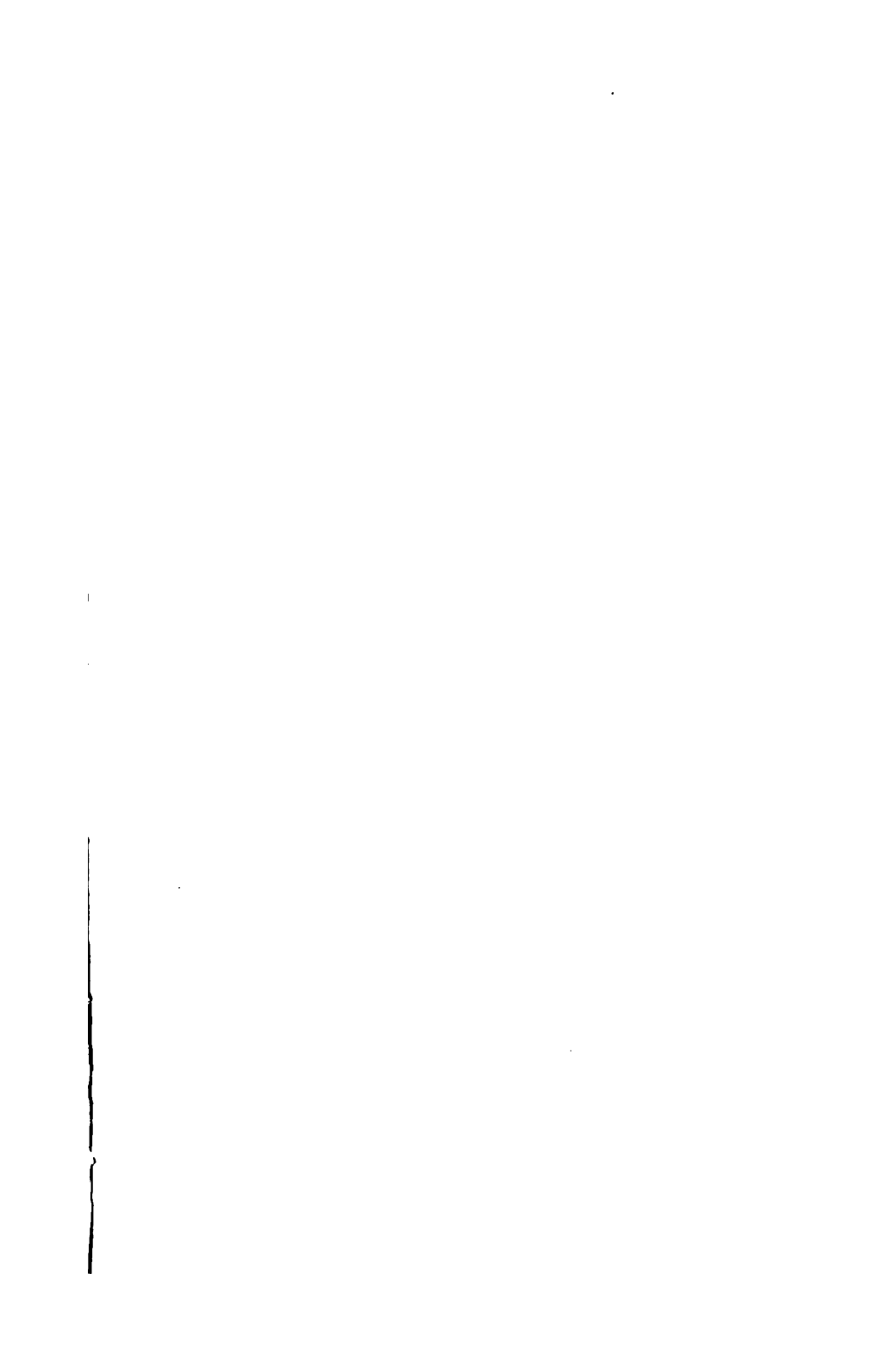
If Mr. Mansel's "necessary truths" are not adequate to such tests as these, how can he maintain that it is a necessary truth that "ingratitude" is wrong,

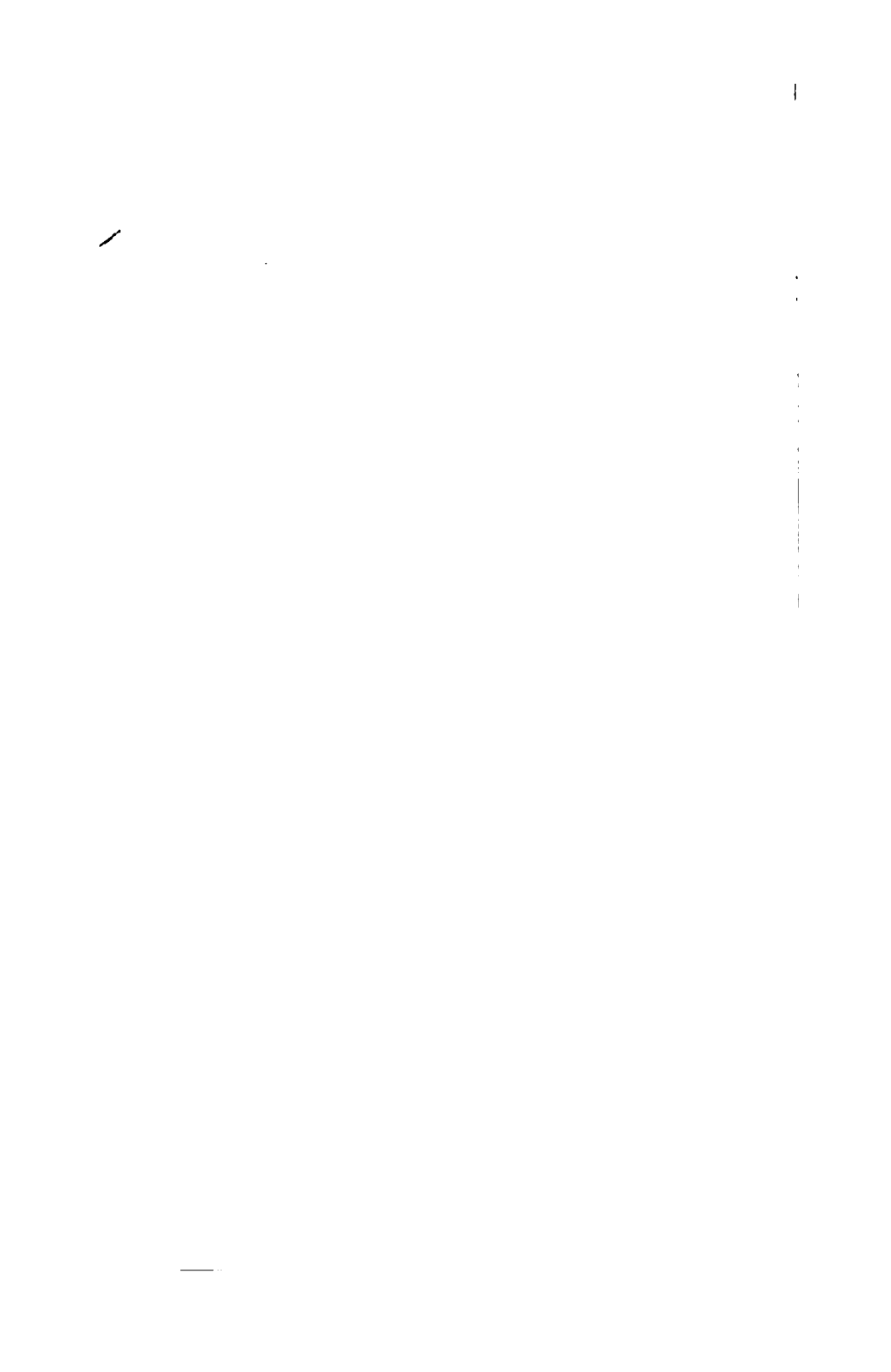
when, with all his great ingenuity, he would find it impossible to say precisely what ingratitude means? The conclusion seems to be, that though it is neither impossible nor improbable that our words and feelings may represent external realities, physical, moral, and spiritual, we are in possession of no verbal propositions whatever respecting any one of them which can claim an exemption from inquiry on its own authority.

June 30, 1860.

THE END.







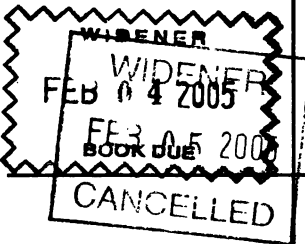
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